

#245

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We first noticed Matt Wilson's stunning artwork on cards for *Magic: the Gathering* and on the cover of *The Duelist* #20. Here he shows us what might have been had Saint George been a trifle shorter.

## Staff

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## Think About the Future

**THE ALTERNITY® GAME DEBUTS** next month, but thousands of you have probably already tried it (in a demo at the GEN CON® Game Fair, by downloading the fast-play rules from the TSR website, or by purchasing the special edition). If you haven't, then check out the fast-play rules enclosed with this issue, and play the solo adventure that appears in next month's issue. "The Omega Variant," by ALTERNITY co-designer Bill Slavicsek, is a short learning adventure that teaches you all of the basic mechanics of the ALTERNITY game while you're playing. You need nothing but your imagination and some dice to play the adventure.

Science-fiction roleplaying games have been around almost as long as fantasy roleplaying games. It was a natural development, since most so-called science fiction is really fantasy cloaked in hardware. (I'll leave it at that, lest some fervent devotee of sci-fi television scolds me again.) In any event, fantasy and science fiction, taken as a whole or as separate entities, are the most diverse genres of fiction. That's what makes room for so many different tastes within the general field, and it's why you'll meet shuttle astronauts and folk musicians at the same conventions. Fantasy is as big as dreams, science-fiction as vast as the future. Both are limited only by imagination.

What's most cool about the ALTERNITY game—besides the core mechanic, which is pretty nifty all by itself—is that it works like the AD&D game. Both systems allow for limitless variation in campaign worlds. Just as AD&D is the engine for the FORGOTTEN REALMS®, GREYHAWK®, and RAVENLOFT® settings, so too will the ALTERNITY game launch many worlds, starting with the far-future STAR\*DRIVE™ campaign. This

way, ALTERNITY is for space opera fans as much as for hard science fiction buffs.

DRAGON Magazine will continue to focus first on the AD&D game, but we won't leave ALTERNITY fans in the cold. As more ALTERNITY game products appear in the coming months, we'll bring you articles full of new material, including rules on vintage firearms, much more detail on the worlds of the ALTERNITY aliens, and perhaps a few surprises.

Ultimately, what will decide how much ALTERNITY material appears in the magazine is your opinion. Would you like to see an ALTERNITY article from time to time? One every month? Would you like an entire section devoted to the ALTERNITY game? (Remember the Ares section?)

Send me a letter telling me what you think of the ALTERNITY game, if you've tried it. What sort of ALTERNITY articles would you like to see in these pages? And, just to satisfy my own curiosity, what are your favorite science-fiction movies and books? Are you a *Star Trek* buff or a Larry Niven *Ringworld* fan? Would you get a bigger kick out of wasting bug-eyed-monsters with psionic powers or out of establishing the first human colony on Europa? Would you rather play a hard-boiled detective in a cyberpunk future or the brilliant scientist who saves the earth from an alien conspiracy?

In other words, which future would you like to play?



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# A Message from the Creative Staff of TSR, Inc.

Dear Gamer,

Hey, listen up. This is serious. Wizards of the Coast acquired TSR last year. So what does this mean to you, the gamer? Everything.

Though much of what makes us TSR has remained the same (almost 50 members of our design, edit, graphics, art, and sales staff retained their positions in the company), there has been one fundamental change—the creative staff is once again the driving force behind our product lines. In our opinion, that's good for gaming, gamers, and TSR.

If you're a regular TSR customer, you've already noticed the differences. If you haven't picked up a TSR product in a while, flip through the newest titles at your favorite store. Look at the art, the graphics. Read a few paragraphs. Buy one and play it with your friends. We're excited by our renewed commitment and new directions, and we believe you will be, too.

We're completely devoted to producing the best game material in the industry and we're constantly striving to improve the quality of our products. But we need your help. We want your feedback and your suggestions—send them to either address listed above.

So, what can you expect to see in 1998? To be blunt, a lot. Our AD&D® roleplaying lines are as strong as ever, and there are a variety of campaign lines to choose from. Watch for the long-awaited return of GREYHAWK® in May.

For storytelling fans, the critically acclaimed SAGA™ RPG adds the MARVEL SUPER HEROES® Adventure Game to a line-up that includes the DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® Dramatic Adventure Game.

The new ALTERNITY® RPG debuts in April, presenting new rules for playing any kind of science fiction you can imagine. The STAR\*DRIVE® campaign premieres in July, providing an edgy space opera setting for the line.

With DRAGON® and DUNGEON® magazines, the RPGA®, dice games, and TSR Books, it all adds up to a powerful and exciting year.

To further demonstrate our commitment, we've created the TSR Gold promotion. FREE items that are useful and fun appear each month from April to October at participating stores. Watch for specifics in ads that carry the TSR Gold logo, check out our web site at [www.tsr.com](http://www.tsr.com), or ask your participating TSR Gold retailer for the latest information. Quantities are limited, though, so visit your store early and often each month to get in on the action.

It's the beginning of a new era at TSR. With loads of new product ideas, a long-standing commitment to quality and excellence, and your participation, we see great things ahead for the future of gaming.

- TSR Creative Staff

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**THANKS FOR THE GREAT RESPONSE** to our recent calls for more letters! While we can't print every one of them, we keep your comments in mind when compiling future issues. Keep 'em coming!

This month, let's take a look at your favorite AD&D® game campaigns.

### The DRAGONLANCE® Setting

Dear DRAGON® Magazine,

In response to your question about favorite campaign settings, mine is the DRAGONLANCE setting. It has been my favorite since I began roleplaying way back in 1989. I got started by reading the DRAGONLANCE books that were out at the time, then I started searching for all of the DRAGONLANCE game material I could find. I've been DMing it ever since.

I am, of course, referring to the classic AD&D setting, not the new FIFTH AGE™ stuff. The book that started

other settings. This is what I believe sets all of the different game worlds apart. The gods are what fuels the power of the clerics in the game. Without them, Krynn loses one of the things that makes it unique.

Second, Krynn has death knights, draconians, and kender. These are all unique to Krynn, though the death knights and kender have popped up in other worlds recently, due to their growing popularity. Draconians are great monsters, their like unseen in any of the other game worlds).

Third, Krynn has a unique and rich history (through the various books), including the creation of the Knights of Solamnia and the Conclave of Hisgh Sorcery. The addition of the Knights of Takhisis was nice as well.

All of these points add up to a campaign world with a lot of potential for

## ... Krynn has a unique and rich history ...

the Fifth Age (*Dragons of Summer Flame*) was a good read, although many questions were left unanswered. The new trilogy is OK, but again it leaves a lot of *Summer Flame*'s questions unanswered, as well as posing quite a few that must be answered in the last book.

What makes the DRAGONLANCE setting my favorite? The first and most noticeable element is its unique pantheon of gods and the fact that there are only 21 of them, not so many as in

adventure. I would like to see more sourcebooks and adventure material published for the DRAGONLANCE setting, especially information on the different storylines and time periods seen in the books.

Will TSR ever release the music of Krynn on CD? There is plenty of it in the various books and game material to warrant releasing one. I'd be more than interested in buying one.

S. DeMink  
Lee's Summit, MO

### The LANKHMAR™ Setting

Dear DRAGON Magazine,

My favorite game world is a bit off the beaten track—I'm a fan of the LANKHMAR setting!

"Lankhmar?" people ask me, puzzled. "Never heard of it." That's a shame. Lankhmar is a campaign setting based on the works of Fritz Leiber, detailing the adventures of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. The novels alone are a treasure hoard of adventure ideas for DMs who are stuck in a rut. The setting itself is just as good; Lankhmar is the most detailed fantasy city in TSR's roster,

What I like most about the setting is its low-power feel. Spells take ten times as long to cast, eliminating the "toss a fireball at the biggest one" strategy and causing the PCs to lean more toward fighters and thieves. Magical items are a rare and precious commodity as well, and they are jealously guarded by their owners. These two factors alone mean that few PCs will ever become all-powerful, a situation that usually leads to player boredom and eventually to campaign death.

Also important are the vibrantly alive setting and memorable NPCs. Lankhmar is a living, breathing city if run properly, from the rowdy nights at the Silver Eel tavern to the strange ones in the Plaza of Dark Delights. And who would quickly forget an encounter with the mysterious Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, the resourceful Thieves' Guild, or even Fafhrd and the Mouser themselves? Not to mention such oddities as Nehwon ghouls, the cloudy form of Hate, or even a brush against the razor-sharp edge of the Slayer's Guildhouse.

A few players shake their heads in disgust after reading the player's guide. "Look at those spellcasting times!" they exclaim. "Magical items that rare? No demi-humans? Yuck!" And they rush back over to their FORGOTTEN REALMS® game. It's true—Lankhmar is not for the power-gamer nor the Monty Hauler, but the setting, in my opinion, is beyond compare.

Please print my full address; it gets really boring out here in Japan, and I'd welcome a chance to correspond with like-minded individuals.

Derek Winston  
OPS/OEM

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## The GREYHAWK® Setting

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

I love Oerth. I've been running a game in the GREYHAWK setting for six years. It only recently ended with my move to Fayetteville, but I expect to start another campaign before too long. It was my first game world, and it has accumulated a lot of personal history: a civil war in the Horned Society (a few years before the Greyhawk Wars), a colony of Kzinti in the Pomarj, a dwarven war under the Griff Mountains, the Isle of St. Cuthbert, and even The Dragon Scourge, when hundreds of evil dragons were summoned to a mountain by an ancient artifact.

TSR created a few adventures and supplements for the world and then left it alone. The beauty of this is twofold. First, it's considerably cheaper to keep up with. The FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, in my opinion, has grown ponderous in all of its supplements, adventures, and novels. Second, the lack of extra stuff forced me to fill in the gaps with what I wanted. The Pomarj is fully mapped out in my world (one of our campaigns focused on it back in 1984-1985, and most of the locations were good enough to keep, including the Mountain of Dragons). When I needed ideas, I either made up my own or borrowed from generic modules or *DUNGEON® Adventures*. The Viscounty of Mistmoor and the Dwarven Kingdom of Dorthazak (the latter formed from *DUNGEON Adventures*' "Train of Events," in issue #44, and "The Iron Orb of the Duergar," in issue #46) are the most prevalent. I even found a place for *The Keep on the Borderlands* between the Shield Lands and the Bandit Kingdoms. The players themselves have even taken a role in charting out parts of my Oerth: The Frost Barbarians became a Viking land and the Snow Barbarians a Celtic society, the city of Fax (on the Wild Coast) had a prominent temple dedicated to Athena (before the Greyhawk Gods went to second edition), and the last evil temple to Wee Jas lay in the northern lands.

All of this has allowed me to create a world to my own tastes and to the tastes of my players. When *From the Ashes* came out a few years ago, I was delighted that nothing in that boxed set or its supplements conflicted



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drastically with anything we'd made up. When I heard that TSR was reviving the GREYHAWK setting I was both excited and leery. I had wanted more information on Oerth for a long time, but at the same time I worry that the more published about GREYHAWK, the more likely that the spots I treasure will be changed significantly enough to require a complete revision of my campaign. (And yes, I know rules of any kind are optional, but I like to stick to them.)

In a nutshell, GREYHAWK is my favorite campaign setting, and I'd love to see more about it published. However, I hope TSR won't overproduce publications for it. The world's charm is its versatility. It can be different things for different DMs and players because, unlike in the FORGOTTEN REALMS, not every centimeter of the world is mapped and described.

Greyhawk allows the DM to act like we used to when the game was young. It forces us to be creative and imaginative. That's what the game originally required, and it's where I have the most fun as a DM anyway. It's what attracted me to AD&D in the first place.

If you print this letter, please include my full name and address. I'd love to hear from other GREYHAWK DMs out there.

**Andy Miller**  
5406 Maryland Drive  
Fayetteville, NC 28311

## The PLANESCAPE® Setting

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

I have a veritable library of AD&D products from all worlds and play and enjoy all of them, so the question of a favorite setting is hard to answer. After many hours spent staring at the ceiling considering the pros and cons of each setting, I have come up with this answer: PLANESCAPE is the best.

Why? Three reasons. (The rule of three, of course.)

One, sure you can foil the plans of the mysterious drow in the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign or defeat an entire clan of giants in the GREYHAWK setting, but it all seems insignificant compared to braving a terrifying layer of the abyss and defeating an Abyssal Lord. Why, such an act will probably save an entire prime world or two.

Two, the fiends are the most dread and popular of foes. The challenge they pose is unparalleled. Let's take a powerful prime world monster, like

beholders for instance, who are certainly fearful and respectable opponents. Then put them to war against just one kind of fiend, say the tanar'ri. Just that one race of fiend could wipe out every beholder in existence without breaking the slightest sweat. The fiends are the ultimate foes.

Three, I've been a DM for only four years, and in that time my local gaming crew and I have had many an all-night heart-pounding session in other settings, but once we started playing PLANESCAPE, it was hard to go back. Of course, we still like the occasional adventure in one of the other worlds, but the multiverse is so mind-bogglingly wondrous that my players find it hard not to jump through any portal they come across, just to hear the description of what's on the other side. (That's proven to be a bad idea on a number of occasions.)

PLANESCAPE is also a world of extremes. The plane of Limbo is so chaotic that it actually has pure chaos swirling through space. Mechanus is so lawful that it's a giant, mechanical machine. Instead of dealing with evil wizards and goodly priests, the players deal with tanar'ri and aasimons, or slaadi and modrons. The Outer Planes represent the alignments so well that my players can usually tell where they are within a few minutes, just by the way the environment looks and feels. The player characters in a PLANESCAPE campaign are quite a bit more powerful than the usual character, but it's all balanced by their surroundings. The typical power gamer gets his *sword +5* or the *robe of the archmagi*, but he's going to have to fight off some incredibly powerful foes with it.

I wrote this letter because I know you'll get tons of letters praising the FORGOTTEN REALMS and RAVENLOFT® settings, and I think PLANESCAPE needs someone to open the eyes of *DRAGON Magazine* readers to the wonders of the PLANESCAPE setting.

**Noah Stacey**  
The Lady's Ward, Sigil

## All About issue #242

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

First let me say that I've been a long time fan of both *DRAGON Magazine* and *DUNGEON® Adventures*, and I applaud the new scheme of *DRAGON Magazine*. I've been reading through issue #242 and have a few things to say.

First, in general, I greatly enjoy the "D-Mail," "Forum," and "Sage Advice" sections and—like many others—encourage their expansion.

Second, keep up with the "Ecology of" articles. These are both highly entertaining reading and extremely useful for DMs.

Third, "Knights of the Dinner Table" is one of the best comic sections your magazine has ever produced. Now, unto some specific statements regarding issue #242.

In my opinion, Mr. Ragonese (in his letter in "D-Mail") is off-base in his complaints regarding his criticisms of the apprentice mage Rautheene. His comments seemed rude and sexist, with terms like "two-bit floozie."

In "Forum," I enjoyed the comments of Chad Dukes and James Thompson. The only thing I can say regarding the clack about cavaliers, humans, multi-classed characters, etc. is that the beauty of the AD&D system is that everything is optional. Hey, if you and your players like something, use it; if you don't, chuck it. Is this so hard for people to understand?

I especially enjoyed the articles by Lachlan MacQuarrie and, of course, Ed Greenwood. I do, however, have one negative comment about Michael Lambert's article, "Mage Construction." Perhaps I just can't stand high-magic worlds running amok with hordes of wizards, but I can't abide the idea of a "Mage Construction Company." It seems to go against the fundamental mystery magic represents.

Well, now I've had my two cents' worth. I look forward with continued interest to the influence the WotC purchase of TSR has had and hope the fundamental essence of the magazine remains the same.

**Matthew Fagan**  
Toms River, NJ  
XandiaDM@aol.com



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## Villainous Slavers

I was surprised and upset to read Timothy Eccles' letter concerning the moral status of slavery (in "Forum," issue #242) and feel his comments require a response.

Mr. Eccles takes an amoral view, arguing that slavery is merely a business venture with "a useful economic function," and the slaver merely a "businessman" fulfilling a putatively "acceptable" societal need. This rationalization is bogus and offensive, and it defies common sense. Perhaps, as a resident of London, Mr. Eccles is not sufficiently familiar with the historically recent example of slavery in colonial and pre-Civil-War America. Slavery was not accepted by the majority of

psychologically to degrade their commodity: inhumane discipline (whipping, beating, etc.) is often the only means to keep a strong-willed human being from exerting his right to freedom. Second, if slaves were so precious and valuable a commodity, why were they routinely packed head-to-toe aboard slave ships, dying in their own excrement?

Finally, the practice of slavery is recognized to have an insidious and profound impact upon the moral character of the practitioner. Thomas Jefferson, who knew first hand, wrote in "Notes on the State of Virginia": "The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unrelenting despotism on the

**... the practice of slavery is recognized to have an insidious and profound impact upon the moral character of the practitioner.**

Americans; the practice was imposed upon the colonies by the British, and American slave owners became (often rather uncomfortably) dependent upon slave labor to keep otherwise unsustainable plantations in operation. The abomination of the practice was long recognized but tolerated for decades as a skeleton in the American closet.

Mr. Eccles' contention that the slave dealer is not necessarily a "villain" due to a supposed concern for the quality (health) of his commodity, also fails pathetically. First, slavers and slave owners did in fact have a strong practical reason both physically and

one part, and degrading submissions on the other."

Whether it be outright slavery or similar modern-day problems such as third-world sweat shops which provide goods for industrial nations, economic profitability is no rationalization for a "business" practice which so obviously degrades human life. The participants in such systems are, without question, villainous, and it is frankly irresponsible to make rationalizations suggesting the contrary, even within the context of a game.

Kevin R. Messner  
Champaign, IL

## Game Balance by Tolkien

On the subject of Monty Haul vs. more balanced campaigns, and the relative strength of magic in a world, I'd like to call attention to an excellent (if well-worn) example of a successful low-magic, low-treasure adventure: the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien. I submit that anyone who wants to run such a game should read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* with an eye to how the author treats magic and treasure.

Tolkien's world is filled with mysteries and magic and riches—but by the end of the books, not that much of it has fallen into the hands of the "PCs." I'm writing from memory here, but if I'm not mistaken, there were only three noteworthy "treasures" (in the usual AD&D® game sense) discovered throughout the story. At no time did the "PCs" walk away with wagonloads of stuff; their situations did not allow for it. Most of the wealth acquired came as gifts from allies.

Magical items are even less common. The items owned by the adventurers by the end of the books included: five magical swords, seven elven cloaks, one magical horn, a pendant of unknown properties, an enchanted phial, one staff, and a box of blessed dust. This spread among eight surviving members of the Fellowship, plus Bilbo: about two items per person, with a couple mostly or completely left out. Also note that there were no "anonymous" items: everything had a history, an explanation, perhaps a name; most were unique.

As for the party's own magic, it contained one spellcaster. Referred to as a wizard, in game terms he would have been more of a mage/priest judging by his known abilities—none of which was particularly high-level by AD&D® game standards. The party's ranger did have some priestly abilities, but they could be attributed almost as much to the herbalism and healing proficiencies—and perhaps even some psionic ability—as to clerical magic.

Now consider the "PCs" opponents: lots of goblins, orcs, wargs, and trolls; giant spiders; one red dragon; one balrog; nine undead warriors; human mercenaries; traitors among their own allies; and a fair number of friends-turned-enemies-by-misunderstanding. With, of course, a demigod-necromancer-tyrant lurking behind the scenes—a foe the heroes fought



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and destroyed without actually meeting him! That's a lot of trouble to go to for what they came away with—especially considering that one party member and numerous NPC friends died—permanently. (The only resurrection occurred by the direct intervention of the powers, only because the character still had work to do.) One person did gain a kingdom and a queen, but at the expense of retiring from adventuring altogether.

There were other prices to pay for success. They saved the world but also doomed the nonhuman races to decline. Three of the heroes were required to leave their world entirely as a consequence of their triumph. Yet

paladin and bard class to a single class, but I don't see why a PC of any race couldn't become one. I still keep magic split as it should be. Humans, elves, and half-elves are the spellcasters, and that's that. However, any of them can become specialists. What keeps an elf from becoming a necromancer or invoker is beyond me.

So, at this point, DM's are either retching at my sacrilege of the rules or beginning to see new ideas. But one question remains. Why play a human? Fair enough. I mean, I've basically changed everything in AD&D that made humans unique. I will answer this in two ways. First off, in *Skills & Powers*, humans gain 10 bonus

something new just because it *might* unbalance his or her game. I say, give it a try. More than half the time, I've found that things that appear to be overpowered only slightly affect a campaign or affect it not at all.

Mike Walko  
fantasyXII@aol.com

## A Few House Rules

I am an amateur DM and pretty good at it, I think. I have attempted to stick to the "rules" that I found in the few books I have read, but I have found that a few changes make the game more realistic.

One change was letting PCs' prime requisite ability scores improve as they rise in level. When a character is originally rolled, we add a 1d100 roll. Each time the character rises a level, we roll 1d100 again and add the result to the PC's prime requisite ability score. The reason behind this practice is that a character grows better at the abilities he uses. "Practice makes perfect," right? A weightlifter steadily grows stronger, and a student steadily grows smarter.

Also, I borrowed an idea from David Eddings' books in the Belgariad saga and changed the Drasnian secret language to Thieves' Cant. I have seen real-life examples of such a language in the form of "street signs." The "speakers" use configurations of the fingers to form letters, and they can do it quite rapidly. It is confusing to the eye, and often you can't even tell that they're doing it. I believe it is realistic and much cooler than substituting slang terms for real ones.

Finally, I have done away with the wizards's ability to cast spells flawlessly. As hard as spells are said to be, why do you never see a wizard fail to cast one? Sure, getting a knife in the gut cuts one short, but spells are supposed to be complex and confusing. I have made a percentage system that allows for human error and bad luck. It also allows a wizard to cast his spell successfully under extreme duress (like missing components, silence, etc.). The chance of failure goes higher with spell level, and high Intelligence adds a bonus. Rarely does a wizard have less than a 95% chance to cast his spell, but there is that chance. If a spell fails, then the caster must roll on the "miscast magic" tables. This brings into play strange

## ... humans have the benefit of sometimes-overlooked advantages.

none of them regretted their actions or would have done any differently.

So: limited magic, limited treasure, one great story. Considering the AD&D game parallels Tolkien's setting in many ways, it surprises me how few DMs seem to follow his example, and how often the Monty Haul campaign becomes a problem.

Jo Ann Spencer  
Address Withheld

## Human Skills & Powers

I've been DMing and playing AD&D for about the last seven years. I just started reading *DRAGON Magazine* with issue #240 and am now compelled to put in my two cents on this whole human multiclass thing that's been discussed the past couple of issues. First off, let me say that I now exclusively use the PLAYER'S OPTION line, which will be apparent from what I have to say. Now, where to begin?

**Level limits:** I don't use level limits in my campaign. In fact, I shy away from a lot of the traditional AD&D rules. I see no reason why an elf or a halfling can't be just as devoted to his class as a human. They even live longer than humans. They have the time to learn, and level limits don't really make sense to me.

**Class Restrictions:** I've had both elven and dwarven paladins in my campaign world, and pretty soon a dwarven fighter/druid will be joining that odd cast of PC's I still limit the

CPs to spend on anything they want. Anyone who uses *Skills & Powers* knows this is a tremendous asset.

The second reason to play humans requires more roleplaying on the part of the DM. To the best of my knowledge, humans are accepted by every race in the AD&D world. Sure, they might be seen as childlike by the elves or carefree by dwarves, but they're still accepted. There is no race that seeks to undermine the humans. For example, in an elven town, a dwarf of gnome is more likely to be watched or outright banned from the city just on appearance before a human is.

Second of all, humans have no evil alter egos seeking to destroy them at all times. I'm speaking mainly of the drow, duergar, and malenti, but there are others as well. Humans have no natural enemies.

And third, humans have the benefit of sometimes overlooked advantages. Here is just one example. If a party is low on funds and its two fighters have recently died in battle, I bet you the human fighter has a better chance of coming back before the elven fighter does. Of course, none of this matters if a DM doesn't take advantage of a human's abilities or doesn't use the costs listed in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* to raise or resurrect characters.

So I guess what I'm saying is that balancing character creation is still a DM's job, but he shouldn't disallow



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effects and the chance that good or ill can come from making a mistake when using powerful spells. All of the gathered energy from a failed spell must be used in some way, but since the wizard couldn't control it, only random chance shows what happens. Effects range from "nothing happens" to "caster saves vs. death." Of course, scrolls are governed by the same rules. Oh, yeah, priests don't get off the hook, either. They are just as subject to failure.

I would like to know whether anyone feels there are reasons not to use these ideas or whether there are official rules that support them.

**Rob Garret**  
Midway, TX

## More House Rules

I would like to address some of the oldest debates in the AD&D game. These would be level limits, multi-class characters, and dual-class characters.

First of all, everyone has their own way of doing things, and what might work well for one group doesn't work at all for another. I have read letters from several DMs with some very good ideas and some ideas that I don't like, but this does not make them right or wrong. As for me, I like to open as many options to the players as is possible. I bend, break, or ignore many of the rules having to do with character creation.

### Question of the Month

*Should some weapons in the AD&D® game remain clearly superior to others, or should the rules be adjusted to make a greater variety of weapons attractive to PCs?*

The question of the Month isn't the only topic we'd like to see you discuss in "Forum." Send your opinions on roleplaying games to "Forum," **DRAGON®** Magazine, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, USA. Send email to [dmail@wizards.com](mailto:dmail@wizards.com). All material should be neatly typed or handwritten. You must include your full name and mailing address if you expect your letter to be printed (we won't print a letter sent anonymously), but we'll withhold your name if you ask us to do so, and we won't print your full address unless you request it.

I do not use level limits in my games. I have found that in low-level games, they don't even come into play, so they are useless. In high-level games, they are too paralyzing. But, if you do not give players some reason to play humans, generally they will not. My solution is to give all human characters a 10% bonus to experience points. We also use *Skills and Powers* which allows humans to purchase a 5% bonus. Combine that with a high prime requisite, and a human can have up to a 25% bonus to experience points. That will act as suitable motivation. This also reflects humans' short life span and their nature to do as much as quickly as possible, while demihumans are longer lived and not nearly in such a rush. It is simple, and it works. For us, that is the best kind of rule. Humans can be multi-classed and demihumans can be dual-classed in my games. Elves for instance, as used in an explanation for level limits, have been said to not have the drive to do one thing exclusively for their long lives. Well, that would indicate that they are doing something else then. If they are doing something else besides frolicking in the fields, then they must have chosen a new profession to pursue. Wham! A dual-class elf. As for humans, they can become bards (very close to a thief/mage) and paladins (close to a fighter/priest). So why not let them play a thief/mage or a fighter/priest. It may be abnormal in your world to have such human combinations, but who ever said player characters were normal?

Many DMs will not allow any of this for fear of having too powerful characters. I have news, this is not a new problem for DMs, especially if you are using the **PLAYERS OPTION** books. (The *Spells and Magic* method for customizing priest characters is subject to a lot of abuse but still is quite useful.) An experienced DM will find ways of making the game balanced.

Lets take the example of the paladin/bard. (As if alignment would allow this, but that's another discussion.) Unless the player could explain in detail how such a combination was possible, I wouldn't allow it. If the player gave a sound argument, I would let one such character join the game. There are plenty of weaknesses that can be exploited to keep the paladin/bard on the same power level

as all the other characters. For instance, use a powerful enemy, say an evil priest that frequently sends lower-level priests to torment the party. The evil priests can turn the paladin/bard. I can hear the other players now, "Some mighty character he turned out to be! He keeps running away at every fight we get into!" To cast any wizard spells, he couldn't wear armor, which makes him an easy target as long as the DM doesn't give any magical protective items. A group of goblins in trees throwing darts could prevent him from any spell casting. If he wears armor, he is nothing but a paladin with fewer hit points and a few minor powers. He doesn't gain priest spells until high levels, and when he does, they are puny in comparison to his other abilities. As with any priest or paladin character, a little intervention from the deity can greatly influence the character's actions. An avatar could pay the character a visit to give him special restrictions, duties, and quests. The point is no game is truly balanced; it is the DM that ultimately balances the game.

I hope this helps some people out, although I am sure it will upset a few (or more). I am not saying this is the best way to do things, but these are ideas worth addressing. You should be warned that letting players have free run of any rules leads to problems. Always use your judgment first and the rules second. I once made the mistake of letting players use the *Complete Book of Humanoids* without restriction. Try running a game with a minotaur, a pixie, a thri-kreen, a kobold, and two humans in the party! I know how things can get out of hand.

I would love to hear other solutions from DMs and players alike.

**Tom Kretschmer**  
704 Fourth Street  
Laurel, MD 20707  
[GypsyBard@aol.com](mailto:GypsyBard@aol.com)





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# Sage Advice

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by Skip Williams

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*THIS MONTH, THE SAGE PAUSES to elaborate on some old advice before discussing a few spells, magical items, and other topics.*

Thanks for all the information on bladesong and bladesingers in issue #244, but I've got a few more questions. The *Complete Book of Elves* says a bladesinger can attack and parry in the same round, without wasting any additional attacks. What does this mean, exactly? Characters using the bladesinger kit gain a defensive bonus when casting spells. Does the character's Dexterity score add to this bonus? The kit description also says a bladesinger can cast spells one-handed. Can spells with material components be cast this way?

When a character chooses to parry with his bladesinging ability, he gains the normal parrying bonus to defense and can still make his normal allotment of melee attacks. According to the optional rule in chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*, parrying grants a character an Armor Class bonus equal to half his level (warriors gain an extra point of bonus), but the character can attempt no other actions while parrying—so the bladesinger's parrying ability is potent indeed. Note that no character can have an Armor Class better than -10.

A bladesinger must follow all the normal rules for spellcasting, which means no defensive Dexterity bonus when spellcasting—even when using bladesinging. (DMs might find it prudent to disallow Dexterity bonuses during bladesinging parries as well.)

A bladesinger can cast any spell he knows one-handed, even if it has material components; note that one-handed spellcasting increases casting

time by +2.

Back in issue #242, you said you use the monster table for the non-existent *monster summoning VIII* spell as an alternate list for the *monster summoning VII* spell. When do you do so?

When the spell summons one 8th-level monster instead of one or two 7th-level monsters. The table in question would be more correctly labeled: "Monster Summoning—8th-Level Monsters." Most DMs I know allow the caster to choose what kind of monsters she will conjure with the *monster summoning VII* spell (that is, 7th- or 8th-level monsters).

Can a *dispel magic* spell send away a monster summoned with a *monster summoning* spell? If so, what's the *dispel evil* spell for?

Yes, any spell can be *dispelled* unless it has an instantaneous duration or its description specifically says it cannot be *dispelled* (or includes some other special note about *dispel magic*). The main advantage to a *dispel evil* spell is that it works without a die roll; *dispel magic* has only a 50% chance of working on another caster's spells, adjusted for the relative levels of the two casters (see the *dispel magic* spell description).

Only evil creatures or creatures summoned by evil casters are subject to *dispel evil*. An evil creature from another plane, however, need not have been summoned to be forced back to its home plane by *dispel evil* (another advantage for *dispel evil*), though if the creature has magic resistance, the spell could fail. Also note that while a *dispel evil* spell lasts, any creature that could be affected (that is, sent home) by the spell has a -7

attack penalty when attacking the caster. (Magic resistance does not apply to the penalty.) Finally, note that *dispel evil* works against "evil enchantments," automatically dispelling spells such as *charm person* and *magic jar* if cast by evil creatures. (To be effective against *magic jar*, *dispel evil* must be cast on a creature whose life force has been displaced by the *magic jar* caster.)

Is the illusory double created by the 6th-level wizard spell *mislead* the equivalent of a *spectral force* image of the caster? If not, what is its equivalent? Specifically, I want to know whether the illusory double can be made to attack in melee (causing illusory damage, etc.).

The duplicate image looks, sounds, smells, and feels just like caster. However, the only thing the image can do is leave the scene. The caster decides which direction the duplicate goes, and how fast, but the caster can't make the image attack.

When dealing with a shadow mage (from the *Spells & Magic* book), a DM has to consider all kinds of saving throw bonuses and penalties. For example, a shadow mage imposes a -4 penalty to opponents' saving throws when casting spells in total darkness. Likewise, opponents gain a +2 saving throw bonus vs. a shadow mage's spells in bright light. What happens when the light conditions surrounding the shadow mage and the target are different, such as when the shadow mage is in total darkness and the target is in bright light?

When in doubt, the light condition around the target determines the saving throw modifier.

In my campaign, there is a female elf mage of 12th level who wears a *ring of wizardry*. Her ring doubles 1st-through third-level spells. I am using the *Spells & Magic* rules concerning spell points, and I'm wondering what effect the ring has.

The ring's "doubling" function provides extra slots of fixed magic. The character gains her normal allotment of spells at each affected spell level before spending any spell points. The 12th-level mage in your example would gain four 1st-, four 2nd-, and four 3rd-level spells for free. The character chooses these spells and then can spend her spell points normally.



The *Wizard's Spell Compendium*, Volume 2, page 311, indicates that when a *permanency* spell is cast in conjunction with an *enchant an item* spell, the caster has only a 5% chance of losing a point of Constitution. *Volo's Guide to All Things Magical* indicates that a point of Constitution is lost every time *permanency* is cast, even with an *enchant an item* spell. Which is correct? Is the reference in *Volo's Guide* specific to the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting or should it be used generally?

The material in the *Wizard's Spell Compendium* is a correction to the *permanency* spell description and applies throughout the AD&D® multiverse.

The description for the *mace of disruption* (and many other item descriptions) says that the mace damages any non-good creature that touches it. Does this count only if the creature willingly touches the mace, or if its skin merely comes in contact with the item? I can see a potentially absurd weapon in the form of 10 *talismans of the sphere* on a stick.

The creature must try to pick up, handle, or examine the item to suffer damage. Nothing happens if someone pokes the creature with the item or throws it at the creature. The foregoing, of course, doesn't make a collection of 10 *talismans of the sphere* any less absurd. (One hopes you were merely exaggerating to help make your point.)

There is disagreement on the proper workings of the *sleep* spell within my new gaming group. I have always played that the spell caster designates the targets (as long as they are within 30 feet of each other) and then rolls the dice and starts with the targets that have the lowest hit dice. My group claims that it has an area of effect and affects all targets within that area starting with the lowest-Hit-Dice creature. Which interpretation is correct?

The DM's interpretation is "correct."

The spell description, however, gives the spell an area of effect (a 30-foot radius), and the spell description also says the weakest creatures in the area are affected first.

What is the duration of the *nightmare* spell (the reverse of the 5th-level wizard spell *dream*)? Is there a limit to the number of *nightmares* a single individual can receive in one night?

A *nightmare* lasts one night. Only the first *nightmare* received during any particular night has any effect on the recipient.

When using the new psionics system from the *Skills & Powers* book how do you determine a creature's MTHACO?

Use Table 77: THACOs & MTHACOs to calculate MTHACO. Most creatures should use the Wild Talent line. Creatures with highly developed psionic abilities, such as mind flayers, should use the psionist line. In either case, a creature's "level" equals its Hit Dice.

## What does an *identify* spell reveal about a cursed item?

I just purchased *Of Ships and the Sea* have and can't find an explanation for some of the movement rates of the ships. Most of them has a single number, and this is easy to understand. However, several have three different rates, like 18/6/12. What is each number for?

The ships with three movement numbers have both sails and oars. As noted on page 13 in *Of Ships and the Sea*, the first number is the movement rate under sails and oars, the second number is movement under sails only, and the third number is movement under oars only. Note that wind strength and course relative to the wind affects movement under sail (with or without oars).

I am starting a PLANESCAPE® game, and my character is an aasimar. I've looked in the *Planewalker's Handbook*, but I can't find a movement table. Could please help me so my character can move and not stay in one place?

If your character is a Signer, it might be best to just wait in one place and let the multiverse come to him. Perhaps that approach doesn't suit you. Here are movement rates for all the races listed in the *Planewalker's Handbook*: aasimar 12; bariaur 15; genasi 12; githzerai 12; half-elf 12; human 12; modron 15; tiefling 12.

What does an *identify* spell reveal about a cursed item? What school of magic will a wizard's *detect magic*

spell reveal when used on a cursed item? This issue came up in a past game. The specific items in question are *dust of sneezing and choking* and *cloak of poisonousness*. The item descriptions in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* are not very clear about this. The description in the *DMG* for the dust says the item appears to be either *dust of appearance* or *dust of disappearance*, and the description for the *cloak of poisonousness* says that as soon as it is actually donned, the wearer is stricken stone dead. Two player characters fell to these items. The party used an *identify* spell, and the items were assumed to

be beneficial. My ruling as the DM was that the *identify* spell revealed a false result, and the *detect magic* spell revealed mixed results (a possible clue that something was not right). Only a more extensive investigation on the item would reveal the existence of a curse.

You seem to have handled things pretty well. A *detect magic* spell generally indicates magic of the enchantment school or magic of whatever school the cursed item is imitating; for example, illusion/phantasm in the case of *dust of sneezing and choking* (because it imitates *dust of disappearance*) or possibly divination or abjuration (if the dust seems to be *dust of appearance*); note that the DM decides what the dust seems to be.

Generally, an *identify* spell should give a false indication when used on a cursed item—usually revealing a power (or magical bonus) the item merely seems to have. In the case of a *cloak of poisonousness*, an *identify* spell probably indicates a powerful magical bonus of some kind. Note that many DMs require an *identify* caster actually to wear or use the item being probed (the spell description merely requires that the caster touch the item); anyone putting on a *cloak of poisonousness*—even for purposes of an *identify* spell—is instantly slain, which makes the item's power pretty obvious. In other cases, a cursed item won't reveal itself until the user is actually under stress or in danger. For example, a wizard could examine a pair of



*boots of dancing* without suffering any harm, perhaps falsely determining that they were *boots of striding and springing*, and nobody would be any the wiser until some poor sap wears them into combat.

Groups who are really wary of cursed items use *commune* or *contact other plane* to confirm that their magical items are indeed beneficial before trusting them. Note that these two spells can help determine an item's exact bonuses or charges (or at least narrow down the range of possibilities).

**Some spells "create" weapons** (*rainbow* and *flame blade* for example), while other spells modify existing objects to act as weapons (i.e., *magical stone* and *shillelagh*). Do any of the following attack roll and damage modifiers apply to these "created" weapons: Strength, specialization, non-proficiency, or racial (elves & halflings)? What are their speed factors? I'm a little vague on these points, because some spell descriptions are more specific than others about which modifiers to apply.

Generally, bonuses, or penalties for Strength and weapon skill (racial or otherwise), don't apply to spell effects that manifest themselves as weapons. Bonuses or penalties from spells such as *bless* and *prayer* apply. As do bonuses or penalties from attack angle (rear, higher, etc.).

Spells that merely enchant normal weapons work just like other magical weapons. For example, *shillelagh* takes a normal cudgel (club) and makes it magical; a *shillelagh* wielder handles the weapon as well (or as badly) as he would handle a normal club. Beware of effects that seem to enchant weapons rather than create them; for example, *spiritual hammer* uses a warhammer as a material component but actually creates a hammer-shaped

field of force (the warhammer being consumed in the process).

To determine speed factor, just use the speed factor of something similar to the "created" weapon. A *spiritual hammer*, for example, has the same speed factor as a warhammer (4), a *rainbow* has the speed factor of a composite short bow (6), and a *magic stone* has the speed factor of a dart (2). If your campaign uses the optional rule that gives lower speed factors to magical weapons, any magical bonus that a created or enchanted weapon has reduces the speed factor. If the spell doesn't grant any combat bonus, speed factor is still reduced by 1; no weapon can have a speed factor of less than 1.

**I was just wondering (perhaps I have misinterpreted the rules) how bonus damage from Strength works when a character wields two weapons. The way it stands, a fighter with two short swords causes quite a bit more damage due to Strength than an equally strong guy with a two-handed sword. Not that I'm all that concerned about damage, but I'm a powerlifter, and it just doesn't sound like a guy could get more Strength into two different blows than a guy who swings a weapon with both hands. I mean, a man with two weapons gains his Strength bonus twice, where Gond the two-handed sword wielder has it only once.**

The rules are officially silent on the matter, which leads most referees to assume a character gains the full Strength bonus for each weapon.

In the interest of play balance, I use a house rule that requires a character with two weapons to divide his Strength between the weapons. Say Gond has a Strength score of 18/00—he has a +3 attack bonus and a +6 damage bonus. If Gond uses two weapons, his player must decide how much of that bonus Gond uses for each weapon. If he puts it all into the primary weapon, the second weapon has no bonuses from Strength at all. If Gond has multiple attacks, he still enjoys whatever bonuses the player has assigned to that weapon for every attack Gond makes with that weapon.

The rule is not official, but try it out and see how you like it.

**I'd like know how you work out the Ego points in an Ego battle**

**between an intelligent sword and its owner. Where does the sword's intelligence come in to it?**

Add the sword's Intelligence rating to the sword's Ego value (calculated from Table 119 in the *DMG*). Compare the result to the wielder's personality score (calculated according to the Weapons vs. Characters section of Appendix 3 in the *DMG*).

**What happens to monsters (or player characters) that are immune to normal weapons when they fall off of cliffs, are crushed under things, or suffer other natural damage. If they are hurt, can't creatures with bludgeon attacks hurt them? A giant's swing can be the equivalent of a 40' fall.**

Usually, a creature that takes a fall or is caught in a cave-in is hurt. A fall or natural disaster isn't a weapon, and immunity to weapons doesn't apply.

Giants can hurt almost anything, not because they can deal as much damage as a 40' fall, but because they function as fairly potent magical weapons; see the *DMG* Chapter 9 "Immunity to Weapons" and Table 48: Hit Dice vs. Immunity.

**Is it possible to advance THAC0s beyond the levels set in the *High-Level Campaigns* book? That is, if a 20th-level character has a magical weapon or a Strength bonus or both, can that character's THAC0 be reduced below the set level?**

The THAC0 limits from the *High-Level Campaigns* book are unadjusted THAC0s; any combat bonuses the character gains, from whatever source, still apply. Note that the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting has its own set of THAC0 limits, but the same principle applies.



*Skip Williams reports that he has not yet suffered the indignity of having a character whose sword was smarter than the character was—except, possibly, for a light-fingered elf named Lucky Bruce who "safeguarded" a paladin's holy sword for a short time. The sword and the elf didn't speak to each other. (That's Bruce's story, and he's sticking to it).*

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## Musical Roleplaying

by Peter Adkison

**ONE OF THE THINGS** I've enjoyed most about roleplaying with my wife Cathleen is her use of music to enhance the roleplaying experience. Several sessions between us have started off with Cathleen playing a song from a CD, using it as a plot element for whatever story she has planned. Perhaps the song will be something a musician has written and dedicated to one of my characters, or simply the music going on in the background during a bar scene. It helps create atmosphere and set the mood for the story.

Cathleen eventually started associating the music of specific real-world artists with several bards in her campaign, and this helped those bards take on more life. We learned that if we went to an inn called The Rep we

might hear a certain bard that sounds like Ani DiFranco, while if we were more in the mood for a band that sounded like The Eagles, we might hear they were playing at The Wicked Inn. Associating a bard with a real-world musician immediately gave us an image of a bard's style and personality. Of course, I immediately wanted to select a real-world musician to use as a model for my PC bard, Hope. After some discussion, Cathleen agreed I could use Stevie Nicks as the voice of my bard Hope, and Fleetwood Mac as the "sound" for Hope's band.

Cathleen ruled that I didn't know all Fleetwood Mac songs right off the bat, that some of her hit songs would have to be composed later in the life of my character. I got to choose two hit songs to start with, so I chose "Rhiannon" and "Gypsy." We then designed a system for monitoring Hope's progress in writing new songs. Once per roleplaying session, I make a proficiency check against Hope's artistic ability (composition) proficiency, and we use this roll to help set the background for the session. If I roll badly, then I roleplay Hope as being in a bit of a slump, and this might influence her mood, particularly if this happens for several sessions in a row. If I make the proficiency check, the quality of Hope's latest composition will be commensurate with how

much I beat the proficiency check by (her artistic ability proficiency score minus the d20 roll). Certain famous Stevie Nicks songs, like "White Winged Dove," might require beating the score by 15. When I make an outstanding roll Cathleen might let me decide, or decide for me, what song it is that Hope discovers and how it happens.

As Hope's repertoire of songs grew, it became interesting to decide which song she would sing on which occasion. Now when I want to have Hope use music to influence the mood of the party, NPCs, or monsters, Cathleen encourages me to select an appropriate song, and she modifies my chances for success by 5% or 10% depending on how well she feels the song fits the mood I'm trying to set.

This idea of having characters try to compose music based off popular artists works easily in both the SAGA® and ALTERNITY® systems. In SAGA, the best way to accomplish this would be with an Aura Action. Flip the top card of the Fate Deck and check its aura. If it is white, the composition is of high quality. If the aura is red, it is an average composition. If a black aura comes up, the composition is below average. A card from the suit of Dragons would indicate writer's block or an absolutely terrible composition, and the specific card the hero used to define his or her Nature would indicate a masterpiece! In the ALTERNITY game, I would require the character to invest in a new specialty skill under the broader Entertainment skill called *musical composition*, which I would price at 1 or 2. Then for a given session it simply requires making a skill check, and the level of success determines the success potential of the song. To get a big hit I might require a step penalty of 2 or 3 steps. The nice thing, of course, about using real-world music for characters in ALTERNITY is that you don't have to explain electric guitars and synthesizers.

If you've done something like this and have an additional twist on it, write in and tell us about it!



*The main reason Peter likes the idea of using real-world artists for his bard characters is so that Cathleen won't expect him to try to sing like Hope!*

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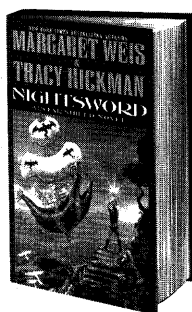
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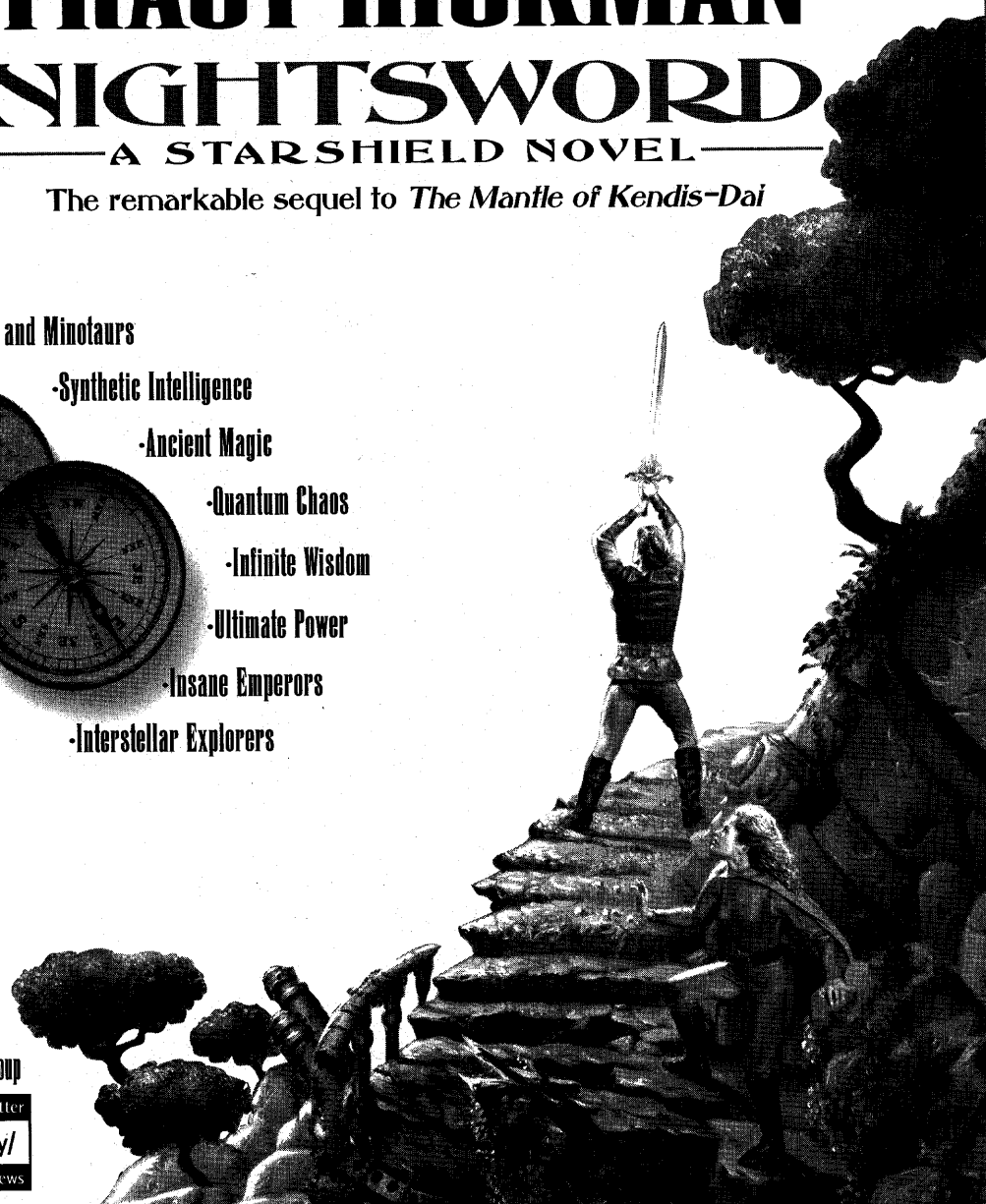
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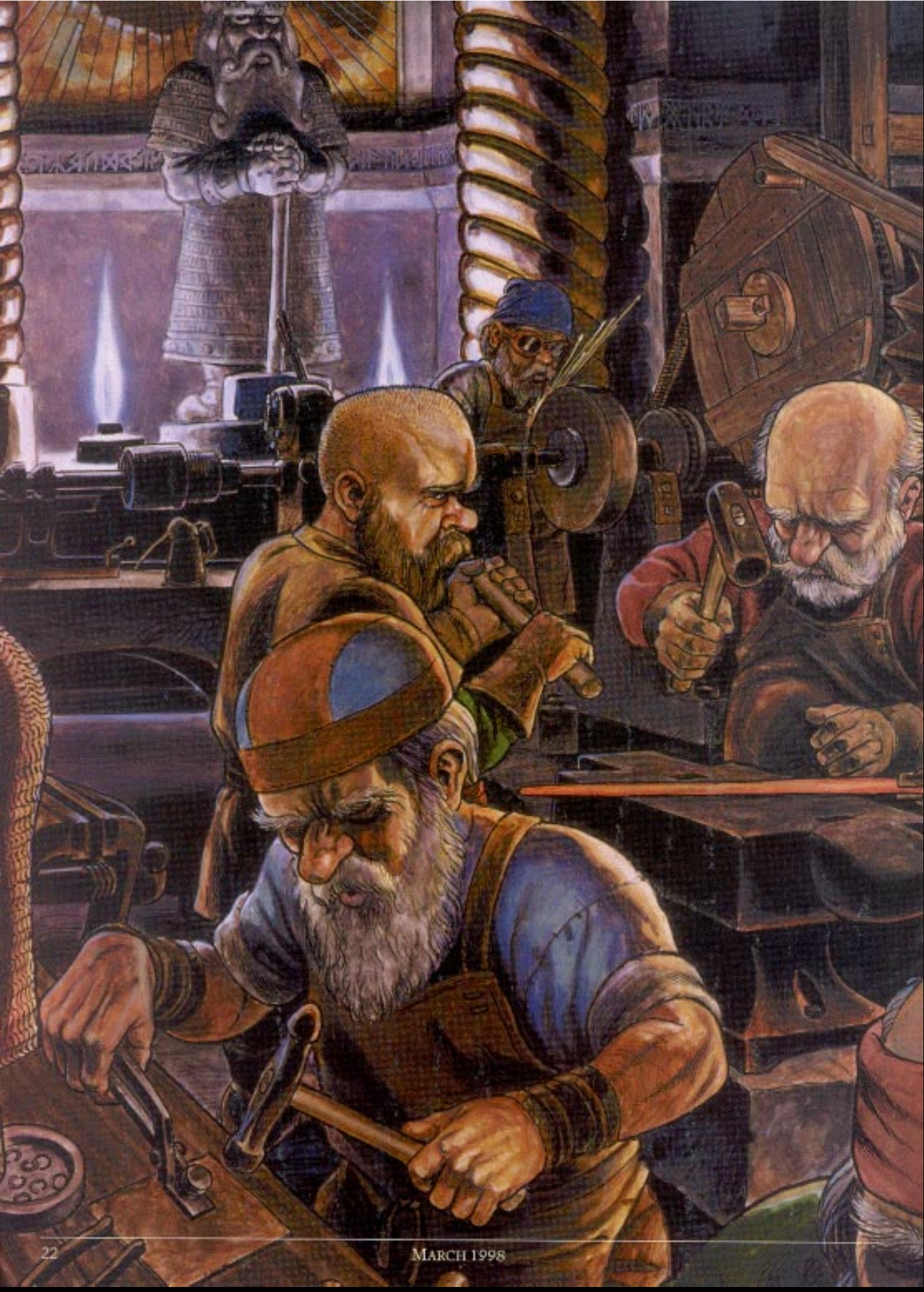
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# HEART OF THE FORGE



## The Dwarven Smithy

by Wolfgang Baur

illustrated by Roger Raupp, Dan Burr, and Diesel

**THE RHYTHM OF THE FORGE** is as steady as the beat of a dwarven pulse; without it, the dwarves would find themselves without a center or purpose. Certainly the dwarves are justly proud of their stonework, their mines, and their carved halls. But their forges are home to their secret hearts, where earth, fire, and sweat combine to turn raw iron into tools and works of art.

According to dwarven legend, Moradin All-Father crafted the bodies of the first seven dwarves at his great forge and gave them souls by blowing onto his creations to cool them. When the first dwarves woke, Moradin had left just two tools for his children: a hammer and an anvil. With these the first seven lords of the dwarves crafted the relic called the Axe of the Dwarvish Lords, the first dwarven weapon. They sang as they worked, keeping time with the rhythm of hammer and bellows, and this song gave the Axe its magical powers.

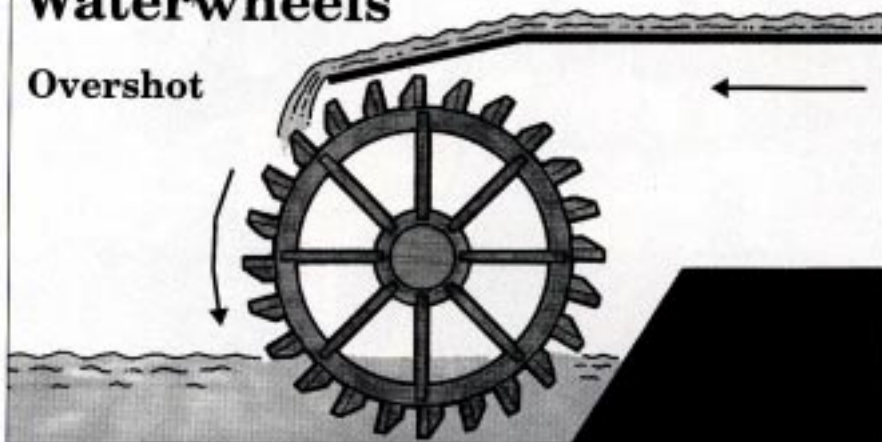
At home under the caverns of the mountain or under the dome of the sky, equal parts earth and air, fire and water, the dwarves are an elemental people. More importantly, dwarves can shape earth and metal with an ease that humans can only envy. The dwarves' confidence comes from their belief that the forge and hammer that Moradin gave them are simply symbols of his larger gift: mastery over the elements. The forge combines all four elements, so it is the purest symbol of Moradin's legacy.

Anyone who understands the dwarven forge holds the key to understanding dwarven identity. The dwarves are reluctant to share their secrets with strangers, preferring to keep their knowledge well-hidden in the secretive darkness of the earth. But it is possible to break the seal set on dwarven secrets and visit the smoky realm of the dwarven forge.

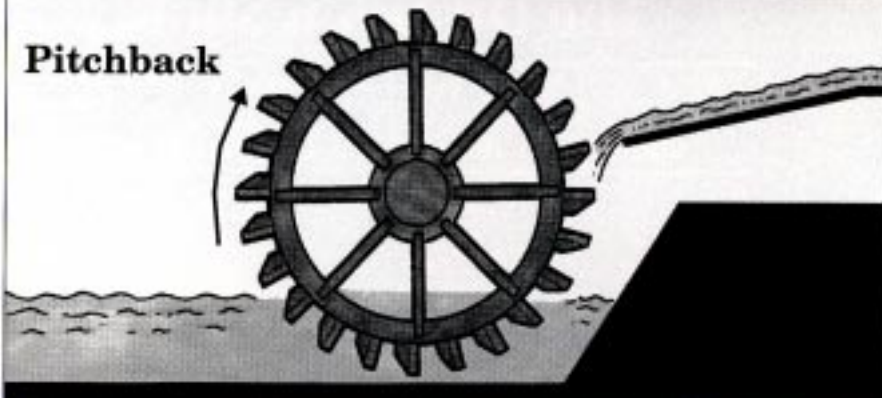


# Waterwheels

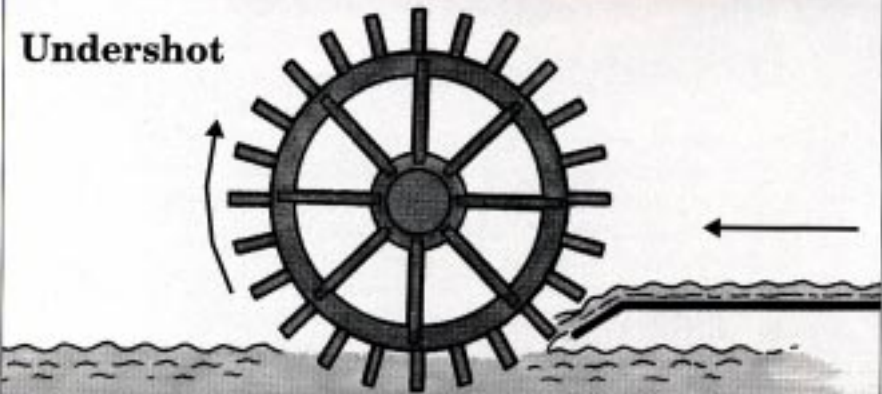
Overshot



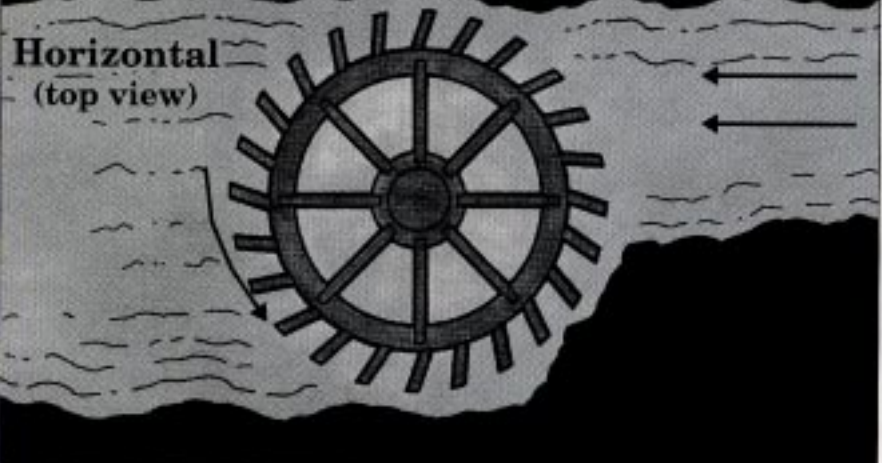
Pitchback



Undershot



Horizontal  
(top view)



## The Dwarven Smithy

The village smith in most human and halfling settlements is a crude craftsman, working iron with hammer and tongs, and keeping two or three apprentices to pump the bellows. The smiths in large arsenals and royal armories might employ more smiths to hammer metal, or they might use animals to pump the bellows instead of employing apprentices, but the fundamental principles are no different from those used by the village farrier, cooper, or blacksmith.

A dwarven forge is significantly different from a human forge. More than just a workplace, the dwarven clan forge is also a *telinom* — a sacred area. In addition, the dwarves' forges rely not only on hammers and muscle power but also on the natural strength of water and wind. In fact, the dwarven forge-priests are fond of describing all ironwork as a fusion of the four elements: water, earth, air, and fire.

## Water

The most obvious use of water in a smithy is in the quenching process, when a smith slakes the hot metal by plunging it into cold water. But there is another, less obvious, use of water in the service of the forge. Just as human millers use water wheels to grind grain, most dwarven smiths construct waterwheels to power their forges. They harness this power in several obvious ways at the forge, but the influence of the waterwheel is felt in all but the smallest dwarven communities.

The waterwheel provides three great advantages for the dwarven forge: it keeps the bellows pumping, it hammers out the rough forms of wrought iron, and it turns lathes to make rounded metal bars. In all three cases, an overshot wheel is the preferred form of power. An overshot wheel is simply a waterwheel that takes water from a trough into buckets on the wheel; the weight of the buckets drives the wheel down (see the adjacent diagram). A successful overshot wheel requires a fall of at least 10 feet. Some blacksmiths prefer to use pitchback wheels, which send the water into an overshot wheel in reverse; pitchback wheels require a slightly smaller fall than overshot wheels, usually 8 to 10 feet or so. In cases where the fall of water isn't large enough for an overshot or pitchback wheel, an undershot or even a



horizontal waterwheel can be used. Undershot wheels are vertical like overshot wheels but are powered by paddles in the stream rather than by buckets of water; they require a small fall of a foot or so. Horizontal wheels provide even less power than undershot wheels, as they simply float and rotate gently in the current. No fall is required.

To lift the hammer, the wheel is part of a triphammer mechanism (see adjacent figure). The wheel's peg presses down on the end of the triphammer, lifting the heavy iron head.<sup>1</sup>

## Air

Of course, the waterwheel that drives a triphammer can just as easily be attached to a lathe or the forge's bellows. To turn a lathe, the waterwheel could be used directly, but this process results in a very slow lathe—too slow for the pace of dwarven metalworkers. To speed it up, a series of toothed gears are applied to the rotation from the waterwheel's axle. The metal cylinders that a lathe turns out can provide the raw workstock for everything from chains to ballista bolts.

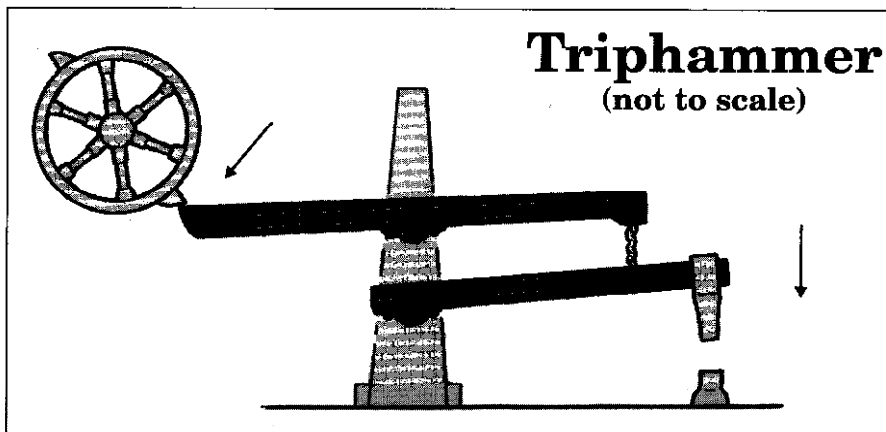
To pump bellows, the dwarven waterwheel has a peg that lifts the bellows, opening it and filling it with air. A weight on top of the bellows then compresses them on the downstroke, forcing air through the coal used to fire the forge. A proper set of bellows is crucial to reaching the highest possible temperature for working difficult metals like iron, platinum, and mithril.<sup>2</sup> Slightly different bellows can also force air into the deepest dwarven halls. Either way, the bellows provide the breath of life to both the dwarves and their smithy.

## Fire and Earth

In addition to water power, dwarves use a wide range of both simple and sophisticated smithing tools. The most important tools in any forge are the anvil, tongs, hammers, mandrels, chisels, brushes, hardies, punches, fullers, flatters, an apron, and a swage block. Hammers, chisels, and hardies are made in two varieties

1. In reality, this mechanism was discovered in the 11th century and applied throughout Europe by fullers, smiths, and even millers. In a fantasy campaign, it could easily be a secret of the dwarves, unknown to other races and one of the reasons for the dwarves' reputation.

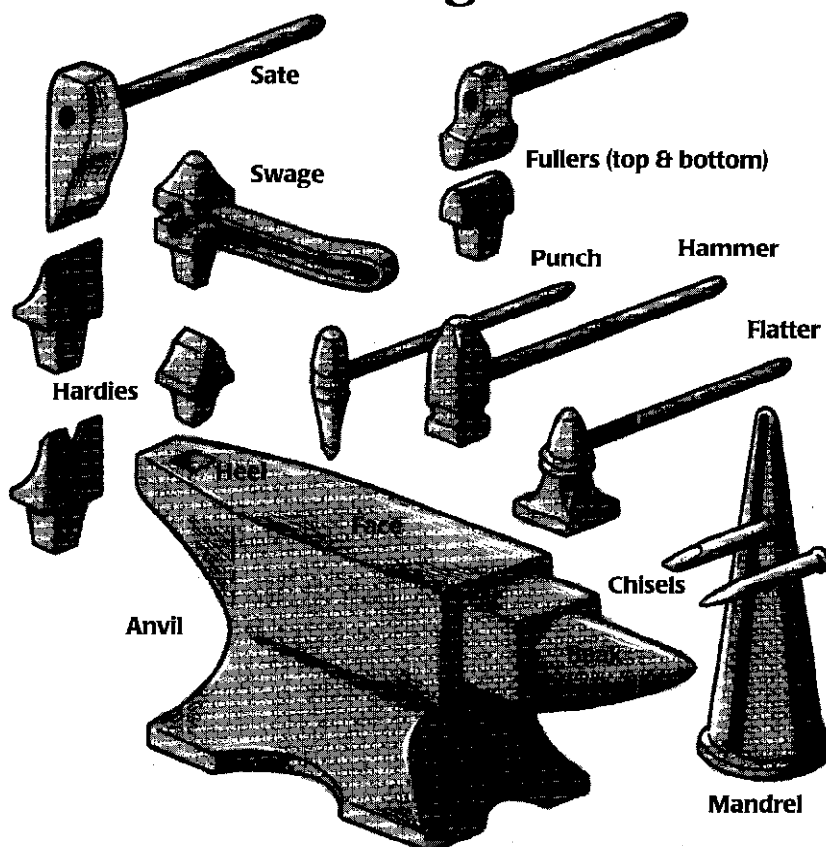
2. Iron melts at 1,539° C, platinum at 1,773° C, mithril at 1,904° C, and adamantite at 2,280° C.



to deal with the differing properties and shapes of hot and cold metal. All the basic forms of the tools mentioned here are shown in the diagram below, but many of these tools, especially tongs and hammers, come in a wide range of specialized types as well. Finally, every smithy contains fire tools, such as pokers, shovels, rakes, a watering can, and a slice (resembling a spatula, a slice is used to lift and move fuel around hot metal). Equipping a complete workshop can cost hundreds or even thousands of gold pieces.

The anvil is graded by its weight rather than size, with a general-purpose anvil usually weighing about 100 to 200 lbs. Jeweler's anvils may weigh as little as 50 lbs., and anvils for heavy work could weigh as much as 800 lbs. The pointed end of an anvil is called the *beak* or *horn*; it is used to bend iron bars and sheets without breaking them. The top surface is called the *face* and is used for hammering and for cutting. The far end of the anvil is called the *heel* or *tail*; it usually contains two holes, one to hold a *hardie*, and one called the

## Tools of the Forge





**Table 1: Ironworks Equipment Costs**

Item	Cost (gp)	Efficiency (SU)
Anvil	100	-
Forge Tool Set	200	-
Geared Bellows	80	+1
Lathe	200	+1
Mandrel, large	90	-
Mandrel, small	35	-
Swage Block	150	+1
Triphammer	700	+3
Wheel, horizontal	200	-1
Wheel, overshot	2,000	+2
Wheel, pitchback	1,500	+1
Wheel, undershot	750	-

*pritchel hole* that serves as a recess for metal to fall through when a punch is being employed. Contrary to popular belief, it isn't the hammer that rings during ironworking: it's the anvil. All dwarven smiths prefer an anvil that rings to one that clunks or clanks, and an anvil that produces a sweeter tone will command a higher price. No one likes to work metal with noise when they can work metal to music; a large dwarven settlement sometimes rings with an entire chorus of anvils.

The *mandrel*, also called a smith's cone, is used to size rings correctly and to make them truly circular. Dwarven mandrels generally have a long groove that allow the tongs free play when putting a ring into place. Mandrels vary in size from a foot high and 20 lbs. for an armorer's mandrels used for making chain and ring mail to a 100-lb. mandrel of four feet in height for general use.

A *swage* is a tool used to create identical curves for rings, round bars, and other cylinders. A *swage block* is used to create identical cups and bowls and to form flat iron into graceful curves matched to exact sizes. The latter weigh anywhere from 100-700 lbs. As you can imagine, relocating a smithy is an adventure in itself, requiring block and tackle and at least two oxen for moving even a small shop.

The hammers are used for most of the basic blacksmithing techniques, including thinning, cutting, bending, and upsetting (tapping the end of a piece of iron, thus thickening the bar). *Hardies* provide the cutting edge when a hammer provides the force for cutting metal; *sates* (or sets) perform the same function as a hardie but cut from above rather than below. *Flatters* do what you'd expect from the name; they flatten a bar or lump of iron into

a sheet of metal suitable for making a breastplate, a shield, a plate, or helmet. *Fullers* are hammer-like tools used before flatters in the process of turning bars to sheets.

Those interested in how blacksmiths use these tools to sculpt sheet iron, bars, wire, blades, armor, tools, horseshoes, and so forth will find that most good public libraries have a volume on practical blacksmithing and metalworking.

## Ironworks

The parts of a dwarven ironworks are simply a means to an end: creating sheet metal, wire, nails, tools, horseshoes, and other goods. To measure the effectiveness of any ironworks can be measured in game terms using the smithy unit (SU). Each smithy unit is the equivalent of a single village smith and two apprentices working all their metal by hand.<sup>3</sup>

Some player characters might wish to build ironworks of their own or might desire to sell an ironworks that they have captured from brigands or humanoids. Building this elaborate a forge requires both the engineering proficiency and one of the smithing proficiencies (armorer, blacksmith, or weaponsmith), and the task could take as long as a year.

Note that a waterwheel and triphammer function together; either item alone provides no additional benefit to the ironworks. Thus, a triphammer driven by a horizontal wheel provides a +2 benefit (+3 for the hammer, -1 for the wheel), whereas a triphammer driven by an overshot wheel provides a +5 overall benefit (+3 and +2).

3. Typical construction times for weapons and armor are provided in the *Complete Dwarves Handbook* and the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*.

## Typical Forge

A typical forge's layout is shown on the following page, with the temple and forge grouped closely together near a water source, in this case an underground river. The forge areas are as far as possible from the living quarters, because of the smithy's heat, noise, and smoke. Dwarves under attack always make their last stand in the forge, fully supported by priestly firepower and their faith. In this respect the forge resembles a castle's keep among humans; when everything else collapses, it is where the dwarves gather strength and regroup in the face of an attack.

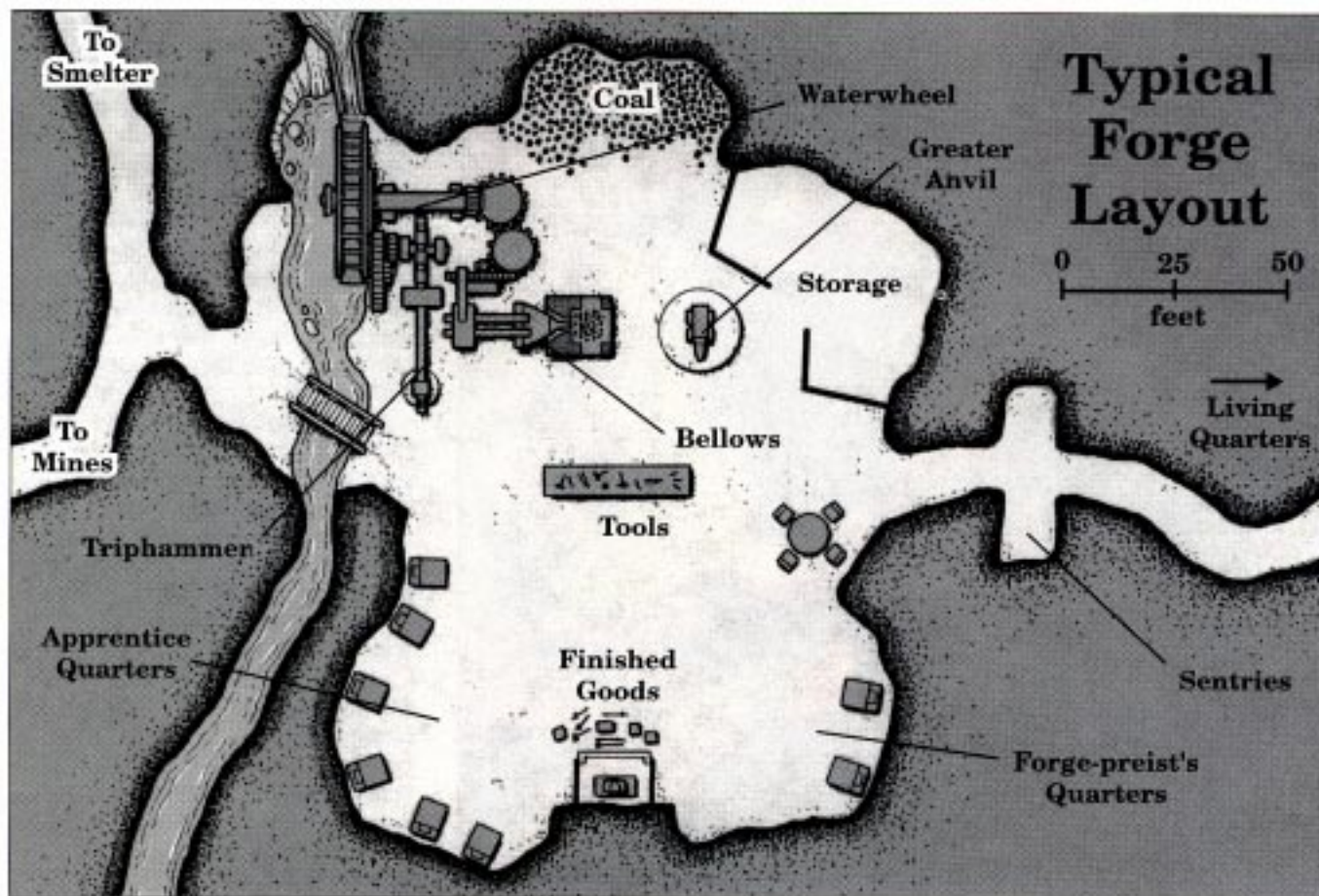
The forge is run by the master smith. This title is sometimes passed down from generation to generation, but more often it is decided by merit. Custom on this matter varies from clan to clan. Other titles in the forge's hierarchy include (in descending order) the journeyman smith, the apprentice, the stoker, the smelter, the miner, and the gate warden (who oversees the transport of the miner's ore and coal into the forge).

The master smith is responsible for producing the flow of trade goods that are the enclave's economic lifeline. Without these valuables to barter for grain, produce, and wool, the dwarves would soon be reduced to eating only what they could hunt or gather from the wilds. The trade goods coming from a typical forge include jewelry, cut gems, intaglio, sturdy farming tools, cutlery, nails, kitchen pots and other implements, chains, weapons, armor, and so on. Each dwarven hold generally specializes in the metals that it can smelt in nearby mineworks.

## High Holidays

Dwarven enclaves open their forges to visitors twice each year, during the dwarven High Holidays. During these days, any peaceful visitor is received with open arms, something as rare among dwarves as forest fires among the elves. On the High Holidays, the gates are left open, all dwarves wear their best finery, whether armor or embroidered tunic, and the forge lies quiet and still, tended only by a young dwarf who keeps the embers glowing. The Closing of the Forge and the Kindling of the Hearth are ceremonies conducted with great ceremony by the





highest-ranking priest of Moradin at the start and end of the festival.

The feasting of the High Holidays begins with the midday meal; until then, everyone is busy preparing food, gifts, finery, and embellishments. With the sound of a single bell or a strike of the great gate with a hammer, the festival's beginning is announced. Clan elders judge competitions in hammer-throwing, cooking, brewing, smithwork, tapestries, and song, and the victors are given small rings or bracers as a token of the honor they have won.

Even nondwarves may enter these competitions, though the dwarves aren't above a little bias toward the local favorites. Tales tell that, at one such yearly competition, an elven smith arrived at the gates of Hammerkeep, seeking shelter among his people's ancient rivals and claiming to be lost in the wooded slopes of the high peaks (and thus we know it is a legend, for surely no elf was ever lost in a forest). The elf was taken in and fed, and he chose to show some of his fine elven chain, with links as small and delicate as jeweler's work. It was the product of five years' labor,

and the links were finer than a spider's web—but they withstood the hardest blows from a judge's testing warhammer. The dwarves stood in shocked silence when the master smith judged the elf the victor. The judge—a dwarf named Ulfgar—was banished from the clan, but he left the next day with the elven smith and wandered with him for years. Some stories say that Ulfgar learned the art of hammer chants from the elven smith and that they forged the first Singing Hammer together; other stories claim that just the reverse happened, and a single line of elven smiths still passes on the dwarven secrets from father to son. Could there be hammer chants or similar forging songs among the elves? Certainly the dwarves deny it, and the elves merely smile at the question . . . though they don't deny the truth of the story.

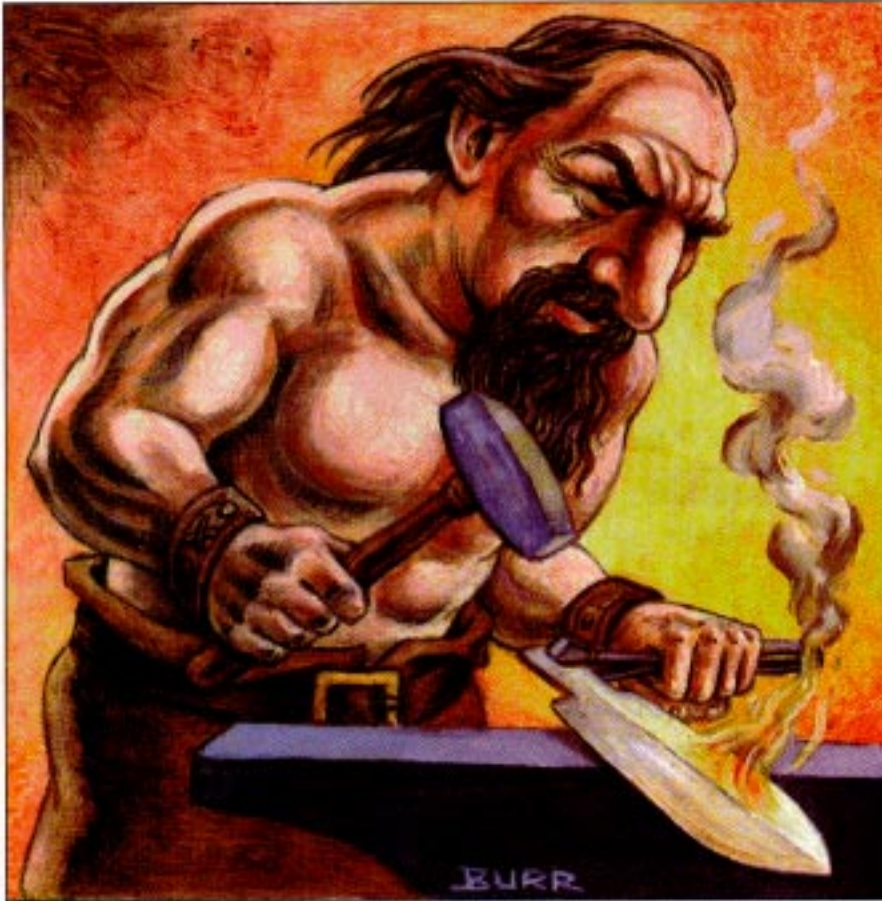
At the end of the festival, visitors are shown to the gate; small stone guest houses outside the enclave lie a short stumble away. The great doors creak shut at sunset, and the enclave returns to its noisy work, deep beneath the mountain's heart.

## Hammer Chants

Though the blacksmith's tools are similar to those humans use, the sacred side of the dwarven forge is readily apparent to even a casual visitor: dwarves are very noisy when they work. The songs they sing are songs of praise for the keeper of the first forge, lusty work songs, or even incantations in the Old High Church Dwarvish that only the priests fully understand. The chants keep the rhythm steady when a team of smiths is using multiple hammers on a single piece of iron. When combined with the chant of a dwarven priest or master smith, the hammer chants used every day at the forge are themselves magical. In fact, blacksmiths are often double as bards among the dwarves.

The most basic of these chants functions much like *combine*, the first-level priest spell that adds effective levels to the priest. The dwarven version is the basic *hammer* chant, after which all the others are named. Other dwarven chants resemble the cooperative magic spells from the *Tome of Magic*. The listings below are just a sample of the diversity of hammer





chants; many more are commonly found in dwarven strongholds, including spells that mimic the functions of *fortify*, *unearthly choir*, and *focus* from the *Tome of Magic*. These spells are not granted to nondwarves, despite persistent rumors that the *steelskin* chant was originally part of the worship of Flandal Steelskin of the gnomes.

Casting these spells takes much longer than ordinary spellcasting, and hammer chants are rarely employed effectively in combat (though the dwarves argue that the priest spell *chant* is simply a corruption of the magic the first dwarves found). These spells all belong to a special school of their own, that of Chants. They include a few zero-level spells, which can be cast by a 0-level caster. See the Forge-priest sidebar for more details.

### Hammer

(Chant)  
Level: 0  
Sphere: All  
Range: Touch  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Special  
Casting Time: 1 turn  
Area of Effect: One dwarf

Saving Throw: None

Using this chant, up to seven dwarven priests and/or dwarven blacksmiths, armorers, or weaponsmiths may combine their abilities so that one of them casts other chants at an enhanced level. If no priest is present, the chant may still be completed successfully, but the casting time doubles. The target of the spell is usually the master smith (granting him the power to lead other magical chants) or the highest-ranking priest. All dwarves taking part in the hammer chant must have the Singing non-weapon proficiency.

The highest-ranking priest or master smith stands at the forge, hammering out time on the anvil, while the others work the bellows and tend to other forging tasks. The dwarf who keeps time is the leader of the chant and becomes the focus of the chant's magic. The leader gains one effective level for each three levels or Hit Dice of the dwarven smiths chanting at their work, to a maximum gain of six levels. While the priest gains no additional memorized priest spells, the priest may gain access to additional chants that were previously unavail-

able to him. Upon completing the *hammer* chant, the group can immediately begin another chant, which then gains the benefit of the increased effective level provided by the *hammer* chant.

If a *hammer* chant is attempted during battle, the chanting dwarves lose all Armor Class bonuses for shield or Dexterity while chanting. If any of them loses his concentration (when struck a blow, or distracted by noise or magic), the *hammer* chant ends immediately.

The material components of the *hammer* chant are a hammer, an anvil, and a forge's fire. *Hammer* chants must be conducted in a forge consecrated to the dwarven gods; human or elven smithies, makeshift forges, and abandoned holdings are unsuited to the successful completion of this chant.

### Miner's Chant

(Chant)  
Level: 0  
Sphere: Elemental (Earth)  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 12 hours  
Casting Time: 1d4 turns  
Area of Effect: 1d6 dwarves  
Saving Throw: None

While not strictly a smith's chant, the *miner's chant* is often conducted at the forge by a forge-priest before a group of miners goes off to the tunnels and begins a day's work. The chant is an invocation of blessings and protection, but it also hardens and improves the miner's tools, increasing their effectiveness and decreasing the chance of their becoming blunted. Miners operating under the influence of the *miner's chant* can operate without fatigue and dig 50% faster while they do so.

The material component of the *miner's chant* is a chunk of ore for any metal.

### Stainless

(Chant)  
Level: 1  
Sphere: Protection  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Permanent  
Casting Time: 3d4 turns  
Area of Effect: 1 lb. metal  
Saving Throw: None

This chant grants any metal an



enduring bright shine, (akin to chrome) and protects the metal against corrosion and decay. However, it is rarely used because of its cost. Imbuing metal with a *stainless* chant requires the sacrifice of a weight of platinum equal to the weight of metal to be protected. Thus, a 4 lb. long sword requires the sacrifice of 1,000 gp worth of platinum (100 pp) to protect the blade. Once protected, no rust, acid, or decay, even that produced by a rust monster or black pudding, can destroy the weapon. Even the strange black metals of the drow are rumored to gain greater resistance to sunlight when treated with this chant.

In the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, this spell is a requirement for the successful application of the *everbright* treatment (*everbright* and other smithing secrets are described in *Volo's Guide to All Things Magical*), which is a secret of the dwarves of Faerûn. Other races of the Realms have attempted to reproduce the secret but have failed because they lack the secret of dwarven chants.

The use of this chant is generally reserved for clan heirlooms, chieftain's weapons, and other important metalwork. Naturally, metals not normally subject to corrosion—such as gold, mithril, and platinum—are not treated with this spell.

The material component of the *stainless* chant is simply the sacrificed platinum.

### Suregrip

(Chant)  
Level: 1  
Sphere: Guardian  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Permanent  
Casting Time: 3d4 turns  
Area of Effect: 1 lb. metal  
Saving Throw: None

This chant makes a weapon or shield stick to its wielder's hand until he voluntarily releases it, making it impossible for the wielder to be disarmed by an opponent or to drop the weapon. Even spells like *fumble* have no effect against a hero using a weapon protected by the *suregrip* chant.

The *suregrip* chant's material components are a scrap of spiderweb from any sort of spider and a thin ribbon of zinc/tin alloy.

### Eversharp

(Chant)  
Level: 2  
Sphere: Alteration  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Permanent  
Casting Time: 1 hour  
Area of Effect: 1 weapon  
Saving Throw: None

This chant magically enhances and maintains the sharpness of a single edged weapon, which must be kept on the anvil for the entire duration of the spell's casting. However, the spell does not provide any other benefit; the weapon can still rust, break, pit, crack, and melt, and *eversharp* chants do not grant any bonuses to attack or damage rolls. Once protected, the weapon need never be sharpened.

The material component is a pin made of silver (10 gp value).

### Moradin's Metal

(Chant)  
Level: 2  
Sphere: Elemental (Earth)  
Range: 10 yards  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Permanent  
Casting Time: 1 turn/oz.  
Area of Effect: 1 oz./level  
Saving Throw: None

This chant creates a mass of unworked metal from nothing. The metal appears on top of the forge, and most dwarven smiths believe that the metal is a direct gift from Moradin or Verdagain, the Keeper of Secrets under the Mountain. The chant works only once each year, during the dwarven High Holidays. It is usually employed to create a small quantity of adamantite or mithril, which is used at the dwarfhold during the course of the year. In many dwarfholds, the metal created by this chant is used only to create sacred objects, and it may not be given to outsiders in any form.

The material component is a strand of hair from the beard of the eldest dwarf of the clan.

### Steelskin

(Chant)  
Level: 2  
Sphere: Protection  
Range: Touch  
Components: V, S  
Duration: Special  
Casting Time: 1d4 turns

### Hammer Chants

Note that zero-level chants may be cast by nonpriests.

#### Zero Level

*Hammer*  
*Miner's Chant*

#### First Level

*Stainless*  
*Suregrip*

#### Second Level

*Eversharp*  
*Moradin's Metal*  
*Steelskin*  
*Stoker's Chant*

#### Third Level

*Bellows Breath*  
*Bloodiron*  
*Dark Alloy*

#### Fourth Level

*Ashen Steed*  
*Pech Chant*

#### Fifth Level

*Secrets of Stone*  
*Tempering*

#### Sixth Level

*Anneal Clan Spirit*  
*Purifying Fire*

#### Seventh Level

*Masterwork*

Area of Effect: 1 dwarf

Saving Throw: None

When this chant is completed, the affected dwarf gains complete immunity to any normal attack by cut, blow, projectile, or similar impact. Magical weapons and spells still have their normal effect, but all mundane weapons are turned aside.

According to some dwarves, objects can also be protected by *steelskin* chants of longer duration (4d6 hours casting time), but this protection does not apply to an object's wearer or owner. Armor protected by *steelskin* does not melt in a dragon's breath or crack under a giant's blow, but it provides no additional protection to its wearer.

The chant blocks 1d3 attacks, plus one attack per three effective levels of the caster. This limit applies regardless of attack rolls; whether the attack would have hit or not, the spell's



### The Forge Priest

The forge-priest is a mature or elderly dwarf who maintains and passes on the dwarven traditions of craftsmanship and worship. However, a dwarven PC can never begin as a member of the forge-priest kit; membership in the society of forge-priests is only offered to settled or legendary smiths with long years of practice at the forge. When membership is offered, a tempering vigil must be withstood by the candidate. If the tempering is successful, any previous kit benefits, status, and hindrances are lost, and the new kit is adopted.

**Role:** The forge-priest makes metal items, teaches chants and the art of ironwork to younger dwarves, and arranges the affairs of the stronghold's forge and temple. They are invariably the most capable smiths at any dwarven stronghold.

**Secondary Skills:** Blacksmith

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Warhammer, throwing hammer

**Bonus Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Singing, access to Chants

*Recommended Non weapon Proficiencies:* Armorer, Blacksmith, Leatherworker, Weaponsmithing

**Equipment:** Smith's hammer, tongs, forge

**Distinctive Appearance:** Leather apron, beard and hair tied back away from embers, sparks and flame. Usually smeared with soot, coal-dust, and sweat.

**Special Benefits:** All forge-priests may use the chants described in this article and may lead other dwarves in their use. A dwarven priest with the forge-priest kit gains access to these spells as if they were regular priest spells. Members of any other class gain access to these spells as if they were a priest three levels lower than their actual level; that is, a 9th-level fighter could access as many chants as a 6th-level priest. If this drops the forge-priest to below first level, the dwarf must conduct a *hammer* chant with enough helpers to gain the effective level required for a given chant. Forge-priests also gain a +1 bonus to saves vs. fire.

**Special Hindrances:** Forge-priests are forbidden from casually destroying metalwork of any kind, even cursed, evil, or broken metal. Instead, they must either repair, sanctify, or purify any such metalwork. In addition, forge-priests must serve as leaders of their community, shepherding other dwarves through the world's trials.

**Wealth Options:** Forge priests gain no additional money when they are accepted into the society that this kit represents. In many cases, they are asked to donate money to build or refurbish a shrine, forge, or temple when they join the brotherhood of forge-priests, but this is not necessary for impoverished dwarves or those who do not seek fame or status as forge-priests.

potency is reduced by one for each possible attack in a round. These attacks inflict no damage on the chant's recipient. The chant's effects last until the chant's recipient is attacked and the magic is invoked. No more than a single *steelskin* can ever be active on a single dwarf at the same time; repeated castings have no additional effect.

Repeated rumors that a dwarven armorer somewhere has enchanted armor with *steelskin* have proven false time and again, but the story persists among the gullible. Less scrupulous smiths sometimes sell armor that they claim is protected by this magic. Dwarven priests and smiths seldom employ this chant for the benefit of anyone but dwarves of their own clan.

The material component of this chant is a pouch of steel filings, which must be scattered over the recipient.

### Stoker's Chant

(Chant)

Level: 2

Sphere: Elemental (Air)

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 round/level

Casting Time: 1-3 turns

Area of Effect: 1 dwarf

Saving Throw: None

The *stoker's chant* is just as often used among smelters as among smiths, but is included here as an example of another type of dwarven chant. The stokers are dwarves who feed the fires that release metal from ore. This chant allows them to double the heat in their smelter, increasing the speed with which they process ore. All functions of the smelter happen twice as quickly.

When used by a cantor of 9th level or higher, the *stoker's chant* creates a

special metal called forge-gold, which a knowledgeable smith can alloy with mithril or even adamantite to make it workable at lower temperatures. Mithril or adamantite alloyed with forge-gold can be worked in an ordinary forge without the need for dragon bellows, silver tongs, or the other specialized tools required for high temperature metalwork.

The material component is a dragon's fire-sac, the portion of its lungs that generates its breath weapon, shaped into a set of bellows. The component is not consumed by the casting of the chant.

### Bellows Breath

(Chant)

Level: 3

Sphere: Elemental (Fire)

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 8 hours

Casting Time: 1-6 turns

Area of Effect: 1 fire

Saving Throw: Special

By creating a wind to fan the flames, this chant dramatically increases the size of any existing fire.

*Bellows breath* also enhances any other fire spell, increasing that spell's damage by +1 point per die.

The chant's magical wind scatters ashes and might put out a fire or dispel the target fire spell, as determined by a turning attempt against "Special" rolled by the highest level priest participating in the chant. (If only smiths are using the chant, they have no chance to succeed.) If the check succeeds (turn or destroy), the fire stays lit and its heat increases to the level required to forge mithril and adamantite. If the check fails, the fire is blown out.

The material components of this chant are a raven's feather and a small leather set of bellows.

### Bloodiron

(Chant)

Level: 3

Sphere: Necromantic, Charm

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 3d4 turns

Area of Effect: 1 lb. metal

Saving Throw: None

This spell creates a magical thirst for blood in a weapon, giving it the ability to inflict great wounds on any creature it strikes. Whenever a blow is struck





with a *bloodiron* blade, it inflicts an additional +2 hp damage by keeping the wounds it causes from closing properly. The spell lasts until the weapon is blooded in combat and then resheathed; if not resheathed after a battle, the *bloodiron* weapon requires the user to make a Wisdom check every round it is held. If the check fails, the wielder is compelled to attack the nearest living creature, friend or foe.

Wounds caused by *bloodiron* do not regenerate (giving the chant its other name, "trollsbane"). *Bloodiron* chants have no effect on blunt weapons or on magical weapons of any kind. Dwarves often cast *bloodiron* on crossbow bolts, creating deep wounds that are difficult to heal. The spell is especially popular among warriors of Abbathor, the dwarven god of greed.

The material component is the iron to be affected, plus the blood of the lead chanter. Casting *bloodiron* requires that the forge-priest to cut himself with the weaponed to be enchanted; giving his blood to the *bloodiron* magic causes 2d8 hp damage to the forge-priest. This damage

### Dark Alloy

(Chant)  
Level: 3  
Sphere: Sun  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: Permanent  
Casting Time: 3d4 turns  
Area of Effect: 1 oz. metal  
Saving Throw: None

This spell transforms an ordinary piece of iron into metal with a number of unusual properties. The material becomes invisible in sunlight and glows when unsheathed in conditions of darkness, whether that darkness is magical or natural. The metal created by a *dark alloy* chant, called *dunchalcor* (and known simply as "dark steel" in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting), is often used to make secret runes for dwarven shrines. The metal is also used as filligree in special weapons, denoting a weapon's maker, its bearer, or even its special powers. *Dunchalcor* is a necessary material component in the *pech chant*.

The material component of the *dark alloy* chant is an ounce of mithril

### Ashen Steed

(Chant)  
Level: 4  
Sphere: Summoning  
Range: 0  
Components: V, M  
Duration: 1 day/level  
Casting Time: 2d6 turns  
Area of Effect: 1  
Saving Throw: None

This chant captures and forms the forge's smoke into a magical steed. The caster(s) must prepare a smoking fire source to create a plume of smoke, which is then captured in a bottle or other sealable vessel. This vessel must be opened within 24 hours per effective level of the chanting group.

When the vessel is opened, the smoke pours out and forms a smoky steed, which takes a form depending on the caster's effective level. The type of steed depends on the level of the caster:

Caster Level	Steed
1-3	Pony
4-6	Don key
7-9	Giant Lizard
10-12	Smoke Wyvern

Each form has an AC of 5 and 7 hp plus 1 hp per level of the caster. If an ashen steed ever loses all its hit points, it disappears. The smoke wyvern flies at a speed of 24, and the smoke dragon flies at 36. None of the *ashen steed* creatures can attack, and none has any special abilities; the wyvern cannot sting and the dragon cannot employ a breath weapon. The pony and donkey can carry only the holder of the bottle, but the lizard, wyvern, and dragon can carry a number of additional creatures equal to the number of chanting smiths and priests who help cast the chant. Once it arrives, the *ashen steed* lasts for a full day or until dispelled.

The material component for *ashen steed* chants vary, but all include a stone vessel inscribed with the chants runes. In addition, the chant requires a pony's shoe, a donkey's halter, a giant lizard scale, a wyvern's stinger, or a dragon's scale.

### Pech Chant

(Chant)

Level: 4

Sphere: Elemental (Earth), Summoning  
Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 2d6 turns

Area of Effect: 1 mine

Saving Throw: None

The chant is favored by miners far more than by smiths, for it summons a group of pech—pale-eyed miners from the Elemental Plane of Earth—into a dwarven mine to assist the workers there. The *pech chant* summons as many pech as there are miners chanting: no more, and no fewer. The pech triple the mine's output as long as they remain working, and because they are expert miners, no unexpected explosion, flooding, or collapse occurs while the pech assist the dwarves. However, the pech can create a siege tunnel, breach a dam, or engage in combat, if so commanded by the lead cantor. As soon as they finish any destructive stonework, the chant ends and the pech return to the Plane of Earth.

If the pech are asked to perform only peaceful work, the chant only lasts as long as at least one of the dwarven miners is still chanting; as soon as a dwarf stops chanting he falls asleep. The pech remain by the dwarves' side, working steadily and

silently, until the last of the dwarves who chanted them into the mine has fallen asleep. Then they return, unseen, to the Plane of Elemental Earth.

The material component for a pech chant is a pick-axe made of finest steel and inscribed with runes of *dark alloy* metal (200 gp).

### Secrets of Stone

(Chant)

Level: 5

Sphere: Elemental (Earth), Summoning

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 3d6 turns

Area of Effect: 1 stone

Saving Throw: None

This spell hastens the slow-moving spirits of the earth to provide information about an underground area.

When chanted successfully, *secrets of stone* allows the cantor(s) to learn who or what has recently passed through a tunnel, pass, or mountain range. Since stone has no concept of time, it cannot relate how recently the creatures have passed, but it can provide complete descriptions and numbers. In areas where the spirits have encountered dwarves before, they pass along their information by covering a nearby wall or stone with dwarven runes describing recent activities. In areas where the spirits have never met dwarves, they form pictures instead of runes.

The spell's duration is a single day, or until the bound spirits answer three questions, whichever comes first. The material component for *secrets of stone* is a geode, a type of hollow stone filled with a crystalline lining.

### Tempering

(Chant)

Level: 5

Sphere: Necromantic

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1d12 hours

Area of Effect: 1 dwarf

Saving Throw: None

This chant tempers the soul of a single dwarf, making him a forge-priest and initiating him into the greater mysteries of the societies among dwarves. The ceremony of the *tempering* chant itself requires a vigil held in a temple of Moradin, and the

words must be chanted both by the initiate and by a single master forge-priest; that is, a dwarven priest of 9th-level or higher or a smith with at least nine slots of smithing nonweapon proficiencies. If the saving throw is successful, the tempering succeeds and the initiate becomes a forge-priest. In addition, completion of the chant grants an additional slot of smithing proficiency and a +1 bonus to all saving throws against fiery attacks. If the chant fails, the initiate loses a point of Strength permanently and may not attempt the chant again until at least 10 years have passed.

The material components are a silver axe (100 gp), a flawless iron hammer (25 gp), and a small golden anvil (500 gp), all of which must be melted down during the course of the vigil.

### Anneal Clan Spirit

(Chant)

Level: 6

Sphere: Guardian, Summoning

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1d4 days

Area of Effect: 1 item

Saving Throw: None

This chant calls up an ancestor of the dwarven clan to give an item intelligence and possibly magical power. Each ancestor can be annealed to an item only once, and dwarven forge-priests keep careful records of which spirits have been called upon, and which clan has the right to call upon the next available spirit.

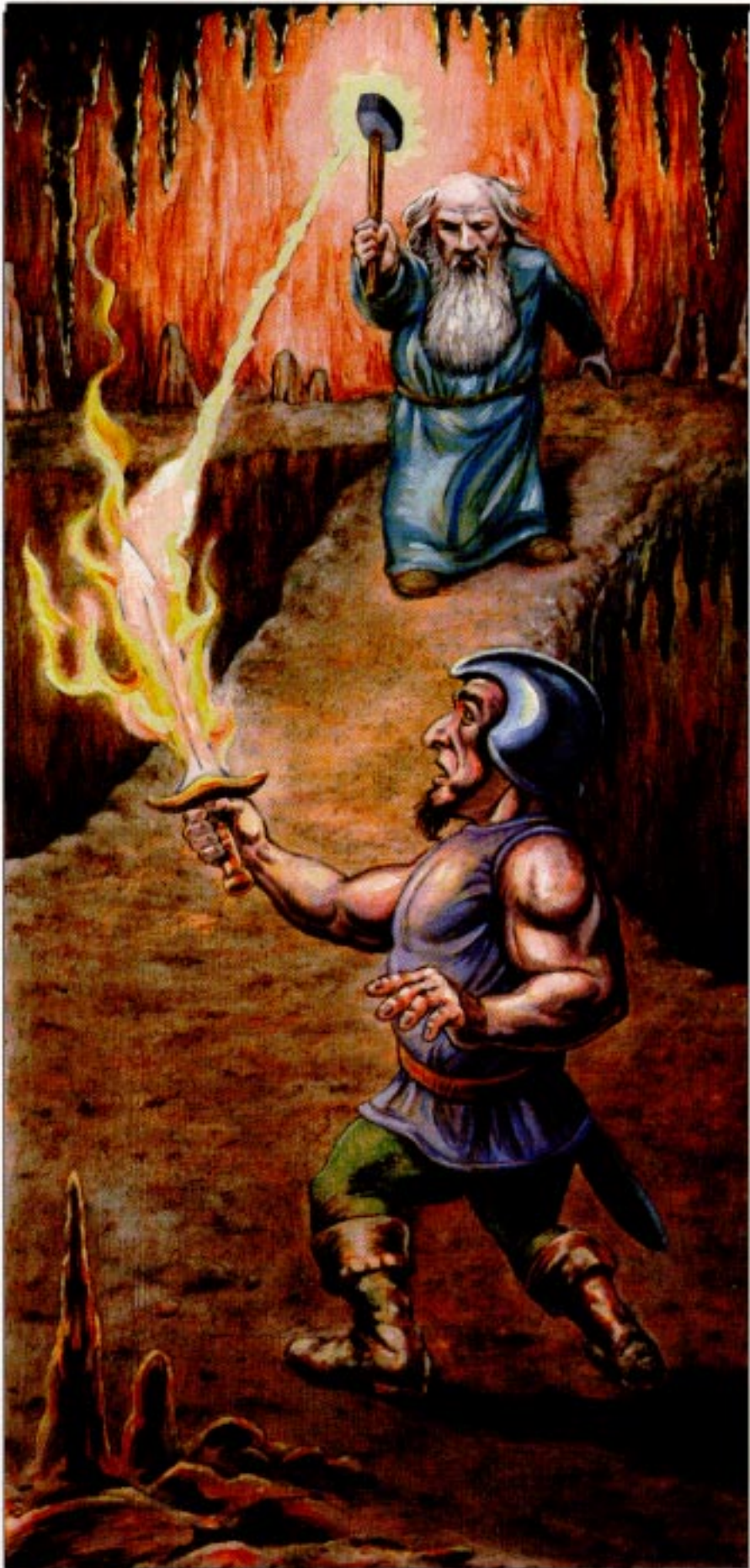
If the chant is completed, the summoned spirit enters the item and grants it the ability to answer questions (as per a *speak with dead* spell). Once all questions have been answered, the spirit is free to leave the item at any time. If it has been well-treated, a successful Charisma check by a dwarf of the spirit's clan indicates that the spirit remains in the item for another year. If the spirit is mistreated, it leaves at once. The longer it stays, the more likely it is that the item will display additional powers. For each decade that the item is inhabited, the DM either chooses an ability or rolls on the accompanying table to determine what ability the item gains. If the same result appears more than once, the effect is cumulative. If the item is



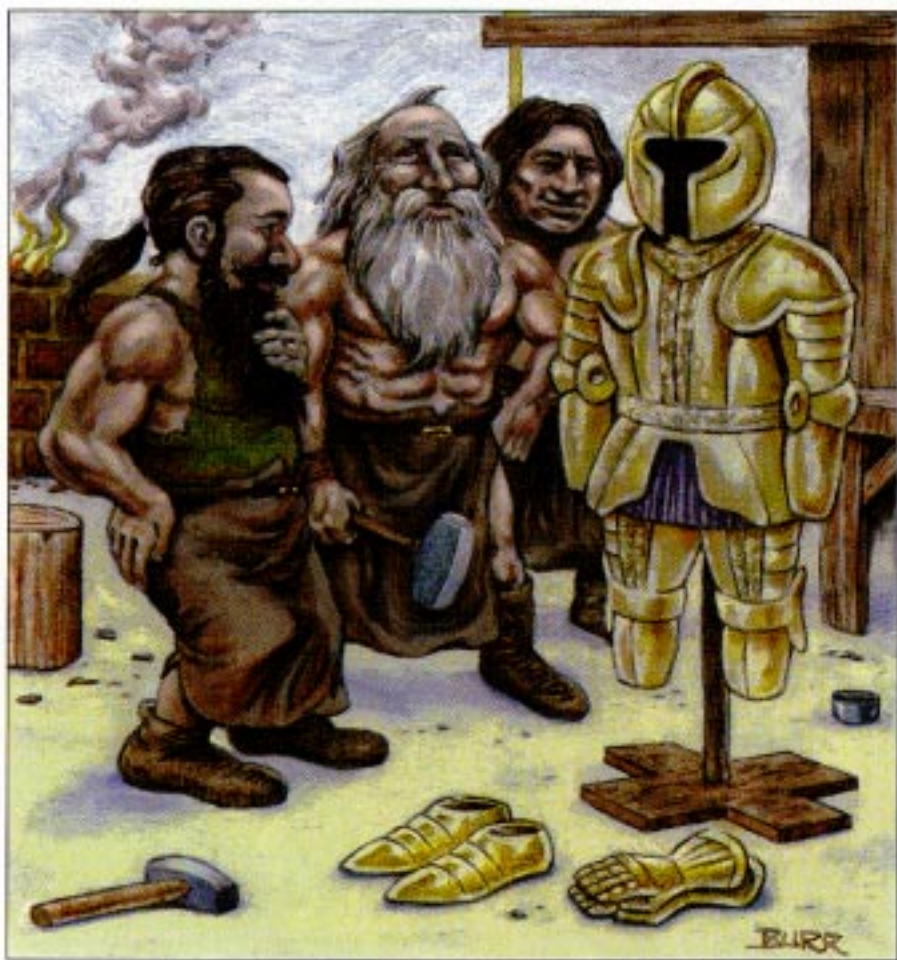
abandoned, it neither gains nor loses abilities until it is again used.

**Clan Spirit Abilities**

1d100	Ability
1-3	<i>Detect evil</i> at will
4-6	<i>Continual light</i> once/day
7-8	<i>Prayer</i> once/week
9-11	<i>Sanctuary</i> once/day
12	<i>Heal</i> once/year
13-20	Gives advice once/month
21-22	Bearer's Movement rate increases by 2
23	<i>Passwall</i> once/month
24	<i>Stone shape</i> once/month
25-26	Bearer never feels fatigue
27-28	Bearer never sleeps
29-30	Bearer's beard doubles in length
31-35	Bearer gains one additional slot of blacksmith nonweapon proficiency (NWP)
36-40	Bearer gains one additional slot of armorer NWP
41-45	Bearer gains one additional slot of weapon-smith NWP
46-50	Bearer gains one additional slot of miner NWP
51-55	Bearer immune to poison
56	Bearer immune to intoxication
57-60	Bearer gains perfect direction sense
61-65	<i>Stone tell</i> once/day
65-70	Bearer gains +2 to attack and damage giants
71-75	Bearer gains +2 to attack and damage humanoids
76-80	Bearer gains +1 AC bonus
81	Bearer gains +1 bonus to all saving throws
82-83	<i>Resist fire</i> once/week
84-85	<i>Resist cold</i> once/week
86-90	Bearer cannot lie
91	Bearer gains <i>true sight</i>
92	<i>Regenerate</i> 1 hp/hour
93	<i>Holy word</i> 1/year
94	<i>Summon earth elemental</i> 1/year
95	<i>Summon fire elemental</i> 1/year
96	Assume badger form once/month
97	<i>Speak with animals</i> at will
98	+4 to attack rolls with crossbow
99	+4 to attack rolls with battle axe
100	+4 to attack rolls with war hammer







Records describing the use of the *anneal clan spirit* chant indicate that annealed spirits have created other effects as well; the preceding table is only a guide.

Each time an item transfers ownership, the new owner must make a Charisma check. If the check succeeds, the item retains both the annealed spirit and its powers. If the check fails, the annealed spirit leaves the item forever, sometimes leaving behind a single minor power as a sign of its long habitation. Items whose spirits have been bound for long periods of time are revered as holy relics by many dwarves, and a clan will go to great lengths to keep such precious objects in the family. They are never sold or bartered away.

Summoning the spirit of a clan ancestor and chanting it into an item requires the cantor(s) to add a bone of the ancestor to the forge's fire.

### Purifying Fire

(Chant)

Level: 6

Sphere: Elemental

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1d4 hours

Area of Effect: 1 item

Saving Throw: None

This chant destroys the magical power of a metal item by bathing it in cleansing flame. The chant alters the color of the forge-fire from orange to an odd mix of orange and purple; this change indicates that the chant has succeeded. No matter how flammable an item might be, it does not burn while held in the *purifying fire*.

The chant functions just as a *dispel magic* does, but it disenchantes the affected item completely and without the need for a percentage die roll to determine success. A *purifying fire chant* always removes all charges or enchantments from an item; it cannot selectively remove harmful powers while retaining beneficial ones.

The material components for *purifying fire* are coke and phlogiston (from the Plane of Fire) or fire elemental essence, both of which are consumed as fuel for the spell's fire.

### Masterwork

(Chant)

Level: 7

Sphere: Creation

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 1d6 months

Area of Effect: 1 forge

Saving Throw: None

The *masterwork* chant represents an enormous effort by a team of smiths, working in shifts for months under the direction of a master smith to create an item of such perfection that it becomes imbued by magical power, as if the *masterwork* item had been enchanted. This chant permits the creation of magical metal items of up to +1 per two extra slots of the relevant nonweapon proficiency of the master smith. Thus, an armorer with only the base proficiency or one extra slot of proficiency cannot create a *masterwork* at all. However, an armorer with three slots (two for the base level of skill, plus one extra) of the armorer proficiency can create a suit of *chain mail* +1, *plate mail* +1, and so on. For items without "pluses," a *masterwork* can yield an item of 1,000 XP value per two extra slots of the relevant nonweapon proficiency (usually blacksmithing). Magical spells that nullify or destroy a normal magical item (*wand of negation*, *Mordenkainen's disjunction*, etc.) have no effect on items produced by a *masterwork* chant.

When the months of effort are finished, the master smith must make a nonweapon proficiency check using his blacksmithing, armorer, or weaponsmith proficiency score, as appropriate. If the check succeeds, the *masterwork* is a success; if the check fails, the work is fatally flawed and must be started over. In either case, the attempt is so exhausting that the master smith cannot attempt another *masterwork* chant for 10 years.

The material component for a *masterwork* chant are a miniature hammer and anvil made of mithril (worth 1,000 gp).

### Magical Smith's Tools

Blacksmiths generally forge and reforge their own tools, reworking them when they wear out or when they need strengthening. Some of these magical tools have become



standard items among the dwarves, including the items described here. Any of these can be forged or made by a ironmonger priest or a chanting company of smiths, using of the specific chants listed below. Creating these items is not the same as a wizard creating a magical item, and confers no experience points—but also runs no risk of losing Constitution. The experience point values reflect the XP gained by making the item, not merely finding it.

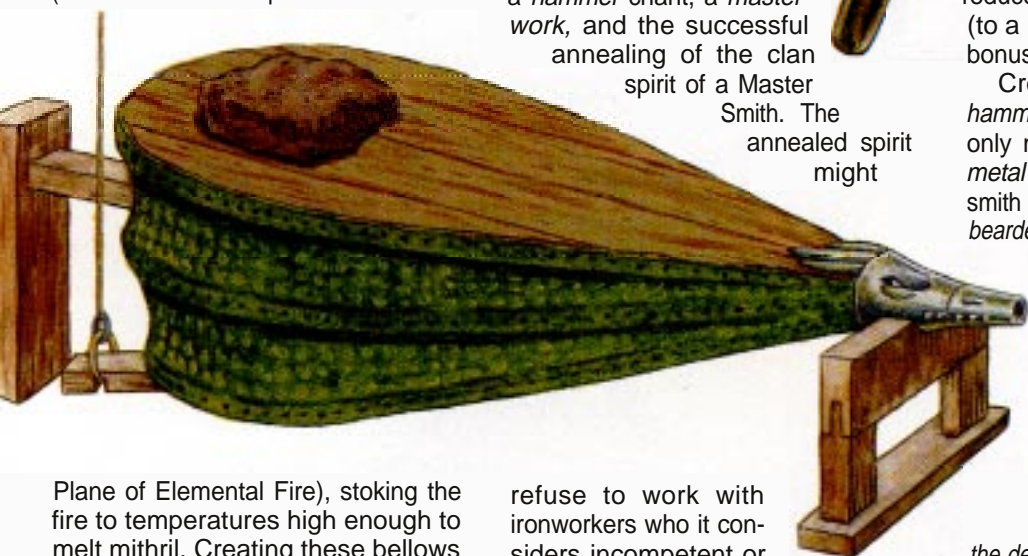
### The Biting Whetstone

This whetstone is made of a marbled greyish-green stone, and often resembles a stone adze or hoe in shape. The whetstone protects every weapon sharpened on it as if it had been subject to an *eversharp* chant. Creating the stone requires a *masterwork* and an *eversharp* chant, and a flawless piece of stone.

**XP Value:** 100 **GP Value:** 500

### The Dragon Bellows

Dragon Bellows are special, golden bellows that are made larger than normal bellows and lined with a fire-resistant leather. They operate twice as quickly as normal bellows and infuse a forge's fuel with phlogiston (the substance that permeates the

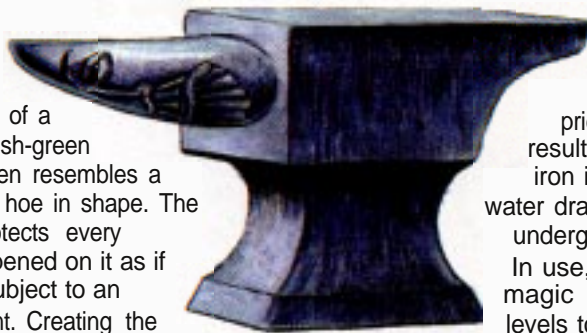


Plane of Elemental Fire), stoking the fire to temperatures high enough to melt mithril. Creating these bellows requires fire-resistant leather or a dragon's fire sac and a competent tanner. The required chants are *masterwork* and *ashen steed*. They add +2 smith units to any forge lucky enough to have them.

**XP Value:** 800 **GP Value:** 1,000

### The Stronghold Anvil

This anvil, first created within the fortress for which it is named, is always made with a beak resembling the face of the master smith at the hold that produces it, but it is always named for the forge of its birth. For instance, a *stronghold anvil* made at Hammerkeep would be called the *Hammerkeep Anvil*. The iron cast for the anvil is



always blessed by the hold's best forge-priest, and the resulting block of iron is cooled by water drawn from an underground river.

In use, the anvil's magic adds four levels to any chant

conducted at that forge, and adds +1 smithy unit to the ironworks where it is used. Even when no chants are conducted nearby, it adds an additional slot of smithing proficiency to any dwarf using it. Thus, a dwarf without any smithing proficiency at all could work metal on a *stronghold anvil* as if he had the basic proficiency.

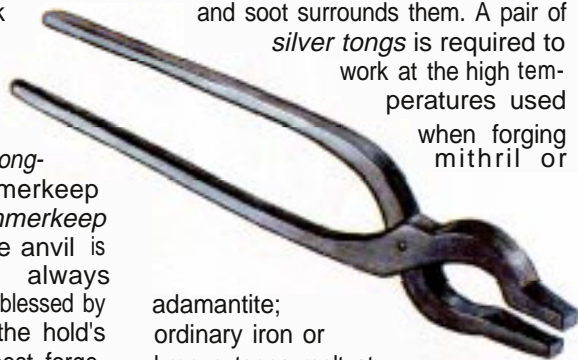
Making the anvil requires a *hammer* chant, a *masterwork*, and the successful annealing of the clan spirit of a Master Smith. The annealed spirit might

refuse to work with ironworkers who it considers incompetent or disrespectful. Even if the chants are all conducted properly, the *stronghold anvil* functions only if the smiths using it gain the approval of the master smith whose spirit resides within the item.

**XP Value:** 1,000 **GP Value:** 2,000

### The Silver Tongs

These tongs always remain spotless, no matter how much coal dust, smoke, and soot surrounds them. A pair of *silver tongs* is required to work at the high temperatures used when forging mithril or



adamantite; ordinary iron or bronze tongs melt at these extreme temperatures. The required chants are *masterwork* and the long form of *steelskin*.

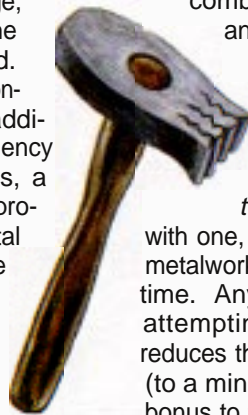
**XP Value:** 250 **GP Value:** 100

### The Bearded Hammer

This hammer is famous for the tone it creates with every blow; when combined with the ringing of an anvil, the hammer produces a two-note chord. In addition to its sweet sound, the hammer reduces the time and improves the odds when creating a *masterwork*. Any smith working with one, dwarven or no, can finish a metalworking project in half the usual time. Any dwarven master smith attempting a *masterwork* chant reduces the time required by 1 month (to a minimum of 1) and gains a +2 bonus to the final proficiency check.

Creating the hammer requires a *hammer* chant and a *masterwork*, using only mithril created with a Moradin's *metal* chant. Only a dwarven master smith over 300 years old can create a *bearded hammer*.

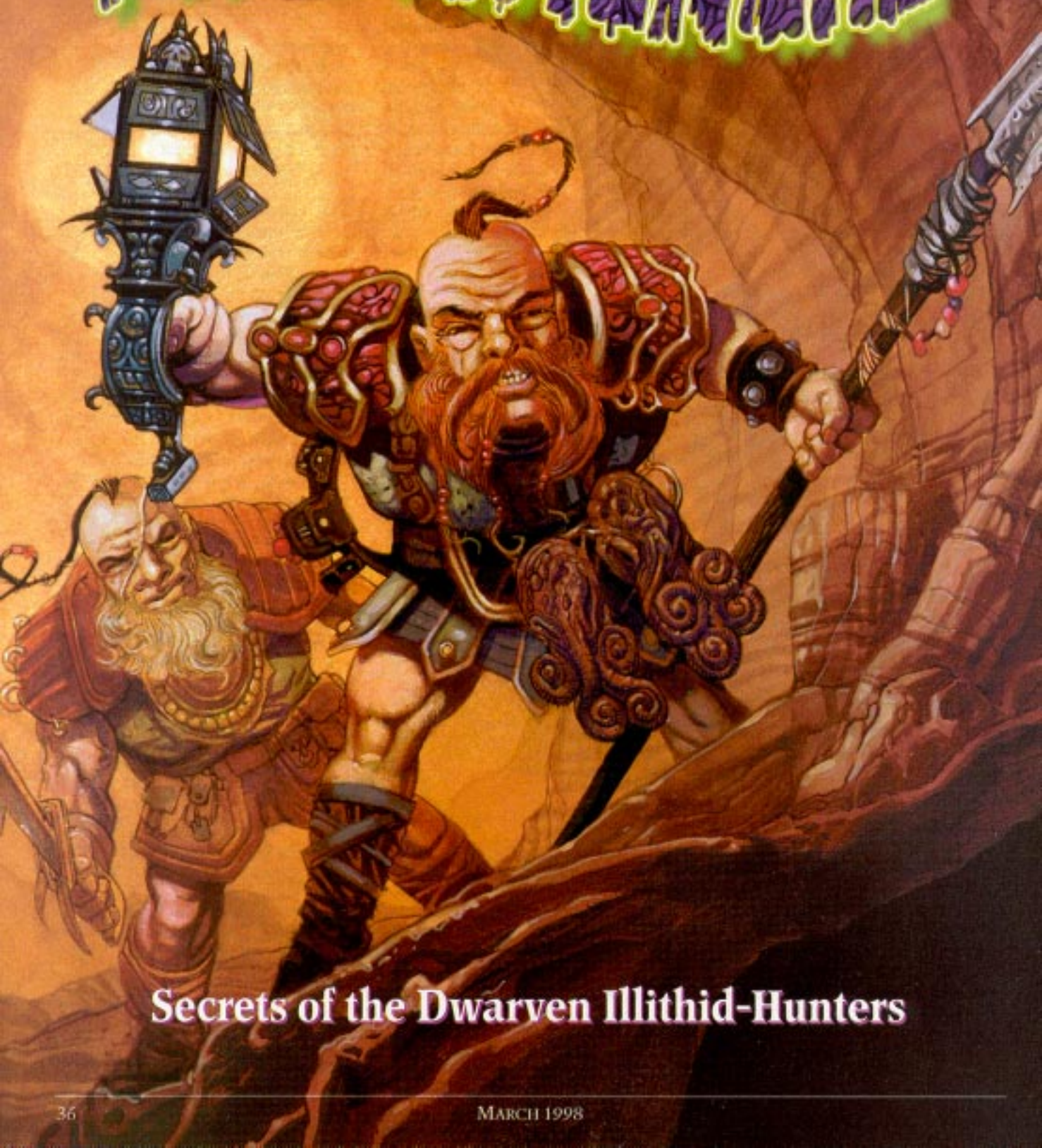
**XP Value:** 5,000 **GP Value:** 4,000



*Wolfgang must have been a dwarf in a former life: the beer, the grumbling, the horned helmet, and the secretive projects conducted in the depths of the earth were our first clues to the truth.*



# MINDSTALKERS



Secrets of the Dwarven Illithid-Hunters





by Bruce R. Cordell

illustrated by Mark Nelson

DWARVES DWELL BENEATH THE EARTH, claiming kinship with stone. No one disputes the magnificence of dwarven subterranean cities, the ingenuity of aquifer dams designed and crafted by dwarven engineers, nor the dwarven tenacity as demonstrated by extensive mines filled with prospectors in the deep earth. Deeper yet than the dwarven works, however, creep dreadful dwellers of the sunless land.

Threats and banes move in lightless corridors that prevent the dwarves' true dominion over the hard and unyielding realm their personalities resemble. Dwarves know one such threat as the *caradhak* (ka-RAD-ack) in their own secret tongue. To the world above, caradhak are better known as illithids, the deadly mind flayers.

A few dwarven clans actively work to overcome the caradhak threat. To this,

end, select groups of dwarven warriors and priests (and even a few "thieves") are trained specifically to hunt and slay illithids. The members of these elite sects possess special skills, items, and (depending on your campaign world) even wild psionic talents that increase the odds of achieving this goal. The dwarves call such groups *caradhaker* (ka-RAD-ack-er), which loosely translates into the common tongue as "mindstalker."

A caradhaker is a dwarf who has devoted significant time training in the ways of fending off, tracking down, and ultimately cutting down members of the hated illithid race. Most dwarven communities cannot boast a true corps of caradhaker, because it is a sect that has only recently spread from the community of dwarves that founded it.





## A Brief History of the Caradhaker Sect

Among the knowledgeable, the dwarven caradhaker discipline is noted for its resemblance to the tenets held by githzerai and githyanki illithid-hunting parties: cleanse illithids and their kin fully from on, below, and between all the worlds of creation. In fact, the caradhaker sect was born soon after a dwarven adventurer named Kulthoven rescued a githyanki illithid hunter from a grisly fate within the confines of an illithid food pen.

Dwarven history records the githyanki survivor's name as Kairoth of Tu'narath. In gratitude, Kairoth shared with Kulthoven his knowledge of illithid ways, his illithid-taking skills and spells, and even a few astral-forged magical items. Kulthoven quickly gathered other dwarves who shared his fierce hatred for illithids, and to them he passed on this strange new lore. After much study and modeling of the skills, mental disciplines, and magical items of the grateful githyanki—as well as a strong dose of pure dwarven innovation—the caradhaker sect was born.

## The Caradhaker (Mindstalker) Kit

The caradhaker bearing embodies measured patience and calm confidence—a demeanor that follows naturally from their secret skills and strict physical and mental disciplines. Mindstalkers are at their calmest and most confident when an encounter with mind flayers is imminent, and they are violently competent in the midst of an illithid encounter.

**Requirements:** A mindstalker can be of any character class normally available to dwarves but must have a Wisdom of at least 12 and an Intelligence of at least 9.

The caradhaker sect cares not whether its members are male or female; however, the sect sometimes pursues illithid spoor into dwarven communities where female warriors are an anomaly. In such cases, gender tensions can cause a community to spurn the help offered by the caradhaker. Female mindstalkers who remain grounded in the discipline of the sect are well armored against this sort of bias.

Those who take up the training to become a caradhaker are devoted for life. The skills, once learned, cannot

be unlearned, and the secret passwords and signs used by fellow members to identify each to the other are also not easily forgotten. What's more, the sect actively seeks out those among the flock who have been lax in accomplishing their duty. A special quest (to destroy a particular mind flayer infestation, for instance) is given to those dwarves whose devotion is found wanting. Those caradhaker who accomplish the quest are once again back in good standing with the sect. Those who do not perform the quest, for whatever reason, are marked as rogues, no better than the illithids themselves, and they are treated as fair game by all other mindstalkers. Such rogue caradhaker usually live only a short time as a fugitive from their vengeful kindred.

**Role:** Caradhaker sometimes work in groups when an illithid community is discovered. Far more often, mindstalkers work apart from the other dwarves in the sect. In such cases, the lone caradhaker travels abroad in search of other dwarven halls, seeking to pass on illithid-slaying skills to uninitiated communities of dwarves.

Of course, a mindstalker does not only pass along his or her skills but also seeks to apply them whenever possible. Mindstalkers are not averse to traveling with adventuring companies of mixed race, because such companies have a reputation for covering large areas. The caradhaker realizes that, sooner or later, the group will encounter illithids and deal with them.

**Secondary Skills:** If secondary skills are used in the campaign, a mindstalker should have the hunter skill.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Mindstalkers can choose any weapon appropriate to their class standards and restrictions.

**Bonus Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Illithid sense, lucid buffer (see "Caradhaker Proficiencies").

**Recommended Nonweapon proficiencies:** Direction sense, underground navigation (see *The Complete Book of Dwarves*), illithid track, cerebral blind, read qualith.

**Equipment:** At the DM's option, a caradhaker may start the game in possession of or with access to one of the new magical items described in "Caradhaker Magical Items."

**Distinctive Appearance:** Mindstalkers appear and dress as appropriate to their class and clan, with two

exceptions. First, many dwarves with this kit wear their hair shaved on top except for a long queue, reminiscent of the githyanki hair style. (Dwarven beards remain inviolate, of course). Secondly, experienced caradhaker often wear one or more shrunken, mummified illithid heads on their harnesses as a mark of their dedication and as proof of past victories.

**Special Benefits:** A mindstalker rechannels the usual dwarven racial hatred for orcs, half-orcs, goblins, and hobgoblins into a hatred for illithids, gaining a +1 bonus to hit and damage in melee against illithids.

Additionally, if the DM uses psionic rules in the campaign, the strict caradhaker training and discipline adds an additional chance (check) for the character to awaken any still-slumbering psionic wild talents within the trainee's mind. (See the "Caradhaker Psionics" sidebar if you use psionics rules; otherwise see "Evolved Caradhaker Proficiencies.") If a mindstalker elects to make the additional check to uncover a latent wild talent, add a +10 percent bonus to the character's overall chance of success. Rules for psionic wild talent and psionics in general can be found in either *The Complete Psionics Handbook* or in the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book.

**Special Hindrances:** Mindstalkers lose the standard dwarven racial ability of a +1 attack bonus against orcs, half-orcs, goblins, and hobgoblins because of their mind flayer focus.

Additionally, if the DM uses psionic rules in the campaign, those dwarves who do manage to awaken a mental psionic wild talent compromise their physical integrity to a small degree. Instead of gaining +1 to saving throws vs. magical attacks and poison for every 3½ points of Constitution, caradhaker with psionic wild talents gain only +1 to these saving throws for every 6 points of Constitution. Thus, a caradhaker with psionic powers gains a maximum of +3 to saves for an 18 Constitution. If the DM allows a player to use the advanced Caradhaker proficiencies instead of wild talents for a non-psionic campaign, the same penalty described above also applies.

**Wealth Options:** A mindstalker starts the game with wealth appropriate to his class, level, and clan.



## Caradhaker Proficiencies

The non-weapon proficiencies introduced below are available only to dwarves who take the mindstalker kit. They should not be available to characters not steeped in caradhaker lore and training, although the DM is free to adapt these proficiencies to rakkma githzerai (“Rrakkma” is the special name githzerai use to identify their own bands of illithid slayers) and illithid-killing githyanki hunting parties, since since caradhaker lore descends from skills originally possessed by these ancient illithid-hating races.

### Illithid Sense

(1 slot, Wisdom -4/-1)

Illithid sense gives the Mindstalker a chance to integrate subtle clues—spoor, “tunnel vibrations,” and even psychic emanations—that indicate the presence of illithids within 200 feet.

This proficiency functions passively; whenever a caradhaker comes within 200 feet of an illithid in an underground setting, the DM secretly rolls a check at the -4 modifier. If successful, the character becomes aware of nearby illithid activity, but not the distance or the direction. Once a check is failed, the DM does not roll for another passive check for a minimum of 1 hour, or until the DM deems that some obvious clue of illithid presence has been overlooked by the character. A mindstalker can also choose to make an active check for signs of illithid activity (no more than 1/hour). The conscious check takes a full 3 rounds to accomplish but is made at only a -1 modifier to the character’s Wisdom.

For example, the DM might tell the caradhaker’s player (after secretly checking against the player’s illithid sense proficiency), “Something tickles the back of your mind—a stray, clammy draft from up the tunnel to the left smells of garlic. In other words, there be illithids here!”

### Illithid Track

(1 slot, Wisdom +2)

Normally, non-rangers find it difficult to track creatures even with the tracking proficiency (since non-rangers suffer a -6 penalty to their proficiency check). Thankfully, caradhaker developed their specialized version of tracking designed specifically to find illithids. This proficiency in no way confers the ability to track other types of creatures.

## Caradhaker Proficiencies

Proficiency	Slots	Ability	Modifier
Illithid Sense	1	Wisdom	-4/-1
Illithid Track	1	Wisdom	+2
Lucid Buffer	2	n/a	n/a
Cerebral Blind	2	Wisdom	-2
Read Qualith	2	Intelligence	-3
Blast Feedback	4	Wisdom	-2
Brain Nausea	4	Wisdom	-3
Anti-Mucous Bulwark	5	Wisdom	-3

Mindstalkers with the illithid tracking proficiency can follow mind flayers across most types of terrain. Besides the Modifier listed above, all the modifiers listed on **Table 39: Tracking Modifiers** in the *Player’s Handbook* also apply.

To track an illithid, a caradhaker must first find the trail. Illithid sense is ideal for discovering the track; however, if mind flayers have been through an area within the hour (or if an eyewitness report or other strong evidence is available), an illithid track proficiency check is rolled to discover the trail. A failed check means that no track is found.

If the trail is found, additional checks are made if the terrain significantly changes, a second track (of any creature type) crosses the first, or the caradhaker resumes tracking after a halt to rest, eat, fight, etc.

Once a tracker fails a proficiency check and loses a trail, another check can be rolled after spending at least one hour searching the area for new signs, or after a successful illithid sense proficiency check. If more than one mindstalker is following a trail, a +1 bonus modifier is added to the most adept tracker’s check.

### Lucid Buffer

(2 slots, n/a)

Lucid Buffer functions differently depending on how the DM handles illithid psionic abilities.

If the DM treats illithid psionics as spell-like powers (as in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* book), a character with the lucid buffer proficiency automatically gains a +4 to saving throws to resist an illithid’s mind blast, *suggestion*, *charm*, and *ESP* powers. This saving throw applies only when those powers are used by an illithid, illithid-kin (ulitharids, vampiric illithids, alhoons, urophions, neothelids, or elder brains) or similarly “psionic” creatures.

If the DM uses psionic rules from *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, an illithid (or other psionic creature) must use the contact power upon a victim to “open” his or her mind before any other power can subsequently affect the victim. A mindstalker with lucid buffer automatically penalizes the contact power score by -4 when an illithid (or another psionic creature) attempts to use contact against the mindstalker. Mindstalkers save against illithid mind blasts as described above.

If the DM uses psionic rules from either *PLAYER’S OPTION: Skills & Powers* or the *DARK SUN®* campaign setting (or as described in the *Illithiad* *MONSTROUS ARCANA* book), an illithid (or other psionic creature) can use any of five psionic attacks to “open” the mind of a victim to further uses of other psionic powers. A caradhaker with lucid buffer reduces his MAC (Mental Armor Class) by -4 to resist having his mind opened by psionic attacks from any creature. Mindstalkers save against illithid mind blasts as described above.

### Cerebral Blind

(2 slots, Wisdom -2)

When the illithid attempts to use *ESP*, *charm*, or *suggestion* in a non-psionic campaign, or if an illithid successfully “opens” the mind of a caradhaker (either with contact or with a successful psionic attack in a psionic campaign), the mindstalker can attempt to trigger cerebral blind with a successful proficiency check before the illithid can actually make use of the power (or use the secondary psionic science or devotion upon the victim). If the proficiency check fails, the power (or secondary psionic effect) works normally.

If the proficiency check succeeds, a complex mental blind comes to the surface of the caradhaker’s mind. The blind is a mental maze incorporating both linear and analog elements,

## Caradhaker Psionics

If your campaign employs psionics rules, then use these abilities rather than the evolved caradhaker proficiencies. Do not use both.

The following new psionic powers are usually available only to caradhaker dwarves with wild psionic talent. Dwarves of this sect that awaken a wild talent as a result of taking the mindstalker kit must choose at least one of their psionic powers from among those described here before acquiring powers from other sources.

The powers listed below appear in a streamlined *Player's Option™: Skills & Powers* format. However, they are also compatible with the psionics system from *The Complete Psionics Handbook*—with the following modifications:

- ❖ Add 6 to the MAC score for each psionic discipline to convert it to a Power Score. Thus, a power with a MAC of 6 has a Power Score of 12.

- ❖ To determine the Preparation Time for caradhaker powers, divide the initial PSP cost by 10 (any result less than 1 translates as 0), rounding down. Thus blast feedback has a Preparation Time of 0.

### Blast Feedback

(Telepathic Devotion)

MAC: 6

PSP Cost: 6/3

Range: 0

Area of Effect: Individual

Blast feedback is useful only against an illithid's mind blast (note that mind blast and psionic blast are not the same). When a Mindstalker with this power falls victim to a mind blast, a successful MTHAC0 check for this power establishes a feedback loop with the individual illithid that first attacked. Blast feedback doesn't trigger unless the mind blast penetrates the victim's higher brain centers—a Mindstalker who successfully

used the lucid buffer proficiency cannot use this power, but a failed lucid buffer proficiency check still allows blast feedback to be used. Basically, the illithid's own power is redirected back at it, catching the mind flayer in its own mind blast. All creatures normally affected by the blast, including the individual with this psionic power, are stunned for 3d4 rounds (as is standard), but the attacking illithid also suffers the same effects.

### Brain Nausea

(Telepathic Devotion)

MAC: 5

PSP Cost: 4/2

Range: 0

Area of Effect: 40' radius

To affect another mind with a psionic power, one must normally "open" the mind of the target to be affected either with psionic combat against another psionic creature or with a successful psionic attack against a nonpsionic creature. Brain nausea is more subtle—it does not require an illithid's mind to be opened, and it affects all illithids within the area of effect.

Brain nausea causes all creatures within the radius of the effect to prefer not to eat a brain while the power functions. For most creatures, this is on par with their natural inclinations anyway, but this anti-brain preference goes against what an illithid would do if presented with a tasty brain. Since this is a subconscious alteration of tastes creatures affected by this power are not likely to realize it.

An illithid affected by brain nausea is 95% likely not to extract and eat the brain of a victim after a successful mind blast or while engaged in melee. The illithid still might decide to capture the victim for later use in a slave gang, employ other powers on the victim, or merely retreat from caradhaker foes, feeling inexplicably sated. No other

motivations of the illithid are affected by this power, and the illithid itself remains oblivious to the reasons for its sudden change in appetite.

### Anti-Mucous Bulwark

(Psychokinetic Devotion)

MAC: 4

PSP Cost: 8/4

Range: 0

Area of Effect: Individual

Much of a mind flayer's physical (and psionic) integrity is tied up in its hideous mauve skin and the thin layer of mucous that glistens thereon. Not only does the mucous serve to keep the illithid's skin moist but it also is tied in with its psionic strength and magic resistance, to some degree. Thus, this power can significantly hurt any illithid.

When this power is successfully triggered, the mindstalker creates an invisible psychokinetic field that coats the dwarf. This field does not interfere with any other energy—physical, magical, or psionic—but the field is destructive to illithid mucous.

When an illithid makes a successful physical attack against a creature with an active anti-mucous bulwark, the illithid loses 1d10 hit points, 1d10 PSPs, and 1d10 percent of its magic resistance (MR). (An illithid's MR never drops below a base 18 percent.) Cumulative damage, PSP drain, and MR drain occurs for every round an illithid remains in contact with a being using this power. An illithid that runs across a creature with this power usually chooses to avoid pressing a physical attack.

Unless an illithid is killed through the use of this power, its magic resistance and PSPs return at a rate of 3 points per hour.

hundreds of similar but subtly different mental pathways that confuse the illithid for 1d4+1 rounds. While the illithid is confused, it can take no other action; however, neither can the dwarf do anything but mentally "hold" the blind in place, possibly giving his or her compatriots a few free rounds of action.

In a psionic campaign, cerebral blind gives the caradhaker up to five chances to close his mind (with a suc-

cessful save vs. paralyzation at a -4 penalty). As soon as the dwarf's mind is closed, the illithid is similarly freed from staring helpless at the cerebral blind.

### Read Qualith

(2 slots, Intelligence -3)

As described in *The Illithiad*, mind flayers use a system of writing based on texture and touch called *qualith*. To the eye, qualith resembles four parallel striated lines. To the non-illithid, the

writing is fiendishly hard to grasp; full meaning comes only to those able to follow each of the four lines with a tentacle or other appendage simultaneously. Each line modifies the meaning of the other lines; the complete meaning is clear only in the gestalt presented by all four lines together.

Mindstalkers believe that to kill the illithids, they must understand the illithids. Thus, some labor to understand the illithid "alphabet." Those with



the read qualith proficiency can run four fingers along the striated lines to attempt to understand the message contained therein. A successful proficiency check allows a basic understanding of a passage or distinct message; fine inferences and nuances cannot be appreciated by non-illithids. Each separate message or passage requires an additional proficiency check to decipher.

## Evolved Caradhaker Proficiencies

In non-psionic campaigns, the mental disciplines of the mindstalkers take the form of “evolved proficiencies.” Of course, these proficiencies are much more expensive than usual and thus not easily acquired. Furthermore, if a mindstalker in a non-psionic campaign takes even one of these evolved proficiencies, he or she immediately accrues the Constitution penalty described above under special hindrances in the mindstalker kit.

### Blast Feedback (4 slots, Wisdom -2)

This evolved proficiency is useful only against an illithid's mind blast—it has no effect against other illithid special powers. When a Mindstalker with this proficiency falls victim to a mind blast, a successful proficiency check for Blast feedback triggers deeply ingrained neuronal pathways in the caradhaker that sets up a feedback loop with the individual illithid that first attacked. Blast feedback doesn't trigger unless the mind blast penetrates the victim's higher brain centers—a Mindstalker that successfully used the lucid buffer proficiency cannot use this power, but a failed lucid buffer proficiency check still allows blast feedback to be used. Basically, the illithid's own power is redirected back at it, catching the mind flayer in its own mind blast! All creatures normally affected by the blast, including the individual with this proficiency, are stunned for 3d4 rounds (as is standard); however, the attacking illithid suffers the same effect.

### Brain Nausea (4 slots, Wisdom 3)

Brain nausea allows a caradhaker consciously to change his pheromone biochemistry through mental discipline and biofeedback techniques. When the proficiency is triggered, the



caradhaker releases a natural combination of pheromones. This subtle chemical change causes all creatures that come into physical contact with the dwarf subconsciously to prefer not to eat a brain, for the creature's taste preferences have been altered. For most creatures, this is on par with their natural inclinations anyway, but this anti-brain preference goes against an illithid's nature. Since this effect is a subconscious alteration of appetite on a biochemical level, affected creatures are not likely to realize what has happened to them. Of course, illithids can be affected by this proficiency only if they make physical contact with the dwarf, due to their inability to detect odor (see *The Illithiad*).

An illithid affected by brain nausea is 95% likely to refrain from extracting

and eating the brain of a victim after a successful mind blast or while in the midst of melee. Of course, the illithid might decide to capture the victim to place him or her into a slave gang, use other powers on the victim, or merely leave after a brief encounter with caradhaker foes, feeling inexplicably “full.” No other motivations of the illithid are affected, and the illithid itself does not realize that it is taking any course of action other than what it would have “naturally” decided.

### Anti-Mucous Bulwark (5 slots, Wisdom -3)

Much of a mind flayer's physical integrity is tied up in its hideous mauve skin and the thin layer of mucous that glistens thereon. Not only does the mucous serve to keep the

illithid's skin moist but it also is tied in with their powers of mind and even their magic resistance, to some degree. (See *The Illithiad* MONSTROUS ARCANA tome for a full explanation of this intricate relationship.) Thus, this power has significant potential to harm an illithid.

When this proficiency is triggered successfully, the Mindstalker consciously takes control of his own biochemistry to a limited degree through biofeedback techniques. Through effort of mind alone, the dwarf exudes an oily, alkaline sweat over his or her entire body for a period of one turn/level. A dwarf using this power looks as if it has just completed a mighty task and is drenched from head to foot in strange-smelling perspiration. Because the sweat can get in a dwarf's eyes and slick his palms, the caradhaker suffers a -1 penalty to attacks while coated, but that is a small price to pay for a barrier that acts like a powerful detergent against illithid mucus.

When an illithid makes a successful physical attack (such as a tentacle strike) against a dwarf with an active anti-mucous bulwark, the illithid suffers 1d10 hp damage and lowers its magic resistance (MR) by 1d10 percent. (Note that an illithid's MR never drops below a base 18 percent.) Moreover, cumulative damage and MR drain occurs for every round an illithid remains in contact with a dwarf using this power, as might happen when an illithid attempts to attach its tentacles to a victim in preparation to draw out the brain). As might be expected, an illithid that runs across a caradhaker with this proficiency usually chooses to avoid pressing a physical attack. Of course, this doesn't stop a caradhaker from attempting to punch or make overbearing attacks against an illithid so as to bring its anti-mucous bulwark into play.

Unless an illithid is killed through the use of this power, its MR score returns at a rate of 3 percent per hour; however, hit points return at their normal rate.

### Caradhaker Magical Items

The items introduced below are usually available only to caradhaker. It is certainly possible that items of caradhaker manufacture have fallen into the hands of non-mindstalkers as gifts, via mishap, or even through

theft. Additionally, rrakkma githzerai and illithid-killing githyanki hunting parties possess items similar to those described below.

### Desh (Urlamp)

These magical lamps look similar to standard dwarven oil lamps, although only 23 *desh* currently exist. Close scrutiny reveals the following message inscribed upon the lamp's base in Dwarvish, "In Darkness, Light." This inscription is the command word that causes the lamp to illuminate an area centered on the lamp's wick like a *light* spell but in a 30' radius for two hours. The *urlamp* (as it is called in the common tongue) can be used in this fashion once in every 24-hour period. The holder of the lamp can extinguish the lamp before its natural expiration, but this still counts as one full use. The light can also be extinguished by *darkness*, *dispel magic*, and similar spells.

What makes the urlamp exceptional is that it is enchanted to confuse the sight of any illithid or illithid-kin that comes into its illumination. Illithids within 30 feet of the lamp become blind, functioning just as a creature moving in complete darkness (-4 to hit foes, etc.). Blinding an illithid startles it sufficiently so that it breaks off an attack for 1d4 rounds if it makes a save vs. petrification—or causes the illithid to flee the radius of the urlamp's illumination if it fails a save.

**XP Value: 850 GP Value: 2,000**

### Kulgari (Path Bolts)

A quiver of 12 enchanted *path bolts* (as they are known in the Common tongue) is a mighty boon for a mindstalker or any who seek to find or harm illithids. When a *path bolt* is fitted to a crossbow string and fired in a random direction, it instantly homes on the closest illithid within a one-mile radius as swiftly as a normal bolt shot from a crossbow. If no illithids are within a one-mile radius, the path bolt simply fires normally. If there is an illithid within one-mile, the path bolt forsakes any normal course or non-illithid to find its true target, even if this requires the arrow to make sharp turns, navigate stairs, or fly down wells or shafts.

If no barriers intervene, a *path bolt* flies from the darkness to attack the target illithid with a THACO of 10 (likely surprising the illithid far more than harming it). If a barrier does intervene,

the bolt slows and falls to the ground in front of the barrier. If the barrier is removed (the door is opened, etc.) any time thereafter while any illithid remains within one-mile of the arrow, the bolt automatically relaunched itself and seeks the nearest illithid, even if different from the illithid initially targeted, resolving its attack as described above. A *path bolt* can negotiate up to three barriers in this fashion before its magic is permanently expended. If a *path bolt* is picked up while it is "pausing" before a barrier, its magic is also expended.

The reason these items are called *path bolts* is that while homing on illithids, the missile leaves behind a glowing phosphorescent trail that fades away after two turns. Before the trail fades, illithid hunters can follow it to their prey. Of course, an illithid that suddenly receives a surprise crossbow bolt in its chest with a glowing trail leading back to the archer might well follow the trail in reverse or dispatch servants to extract its vengeance.

Once used, a path bolt loses all enchantment, becoming a normal, if well-fletched, crossbow bolt.

**XP Value: 2,000 GP Value: 1,000**

### Malgari (Bolts of Deprivation)

These powerful magical bolts appear much as normal bolts appropriate for use in crossbows, except for a special caradhaker design along their shafts. *Bolts of deprivation* (as they are called in the Common tongue) are normally discovered in quivers of 12. Against most targets, the *bolts of deprivation* act as one-use *bolts +1*, but against illithids *malgari* are more useful. Each bolt is magically enchanted to destructively interfere with an illithid's magic resistance (by neutralizing a portion of a mind flayer's psychoactive body-covering slime).

Each *bolt of deprivation* that successfully hits an illithid causes the illithid to lose 3-18% (3d6) of its magic resistance for a period of 1 turn. Multiple bolts have a cumulative effect upon an illithid's magic resistance total (i.e., three bolts that strike the same illithid each for a 9% MR reduction drain the illithid of 27% MR); however, a mind flayer's magic resistance regenerates back to full (90%) after one turn.

**XP Value: 2,000 GP Value: 1,000**



### Ashek Kuldell (Serving Axe)

*Ashek Kuldell* is a unique magical item. The haft of the axe is carved of ironwood, and its blade is forged of an ore originally brought by Kairoth from the rocky remains of an unhallowed god adrift in the Astral Plane. Such esteemed origins also invested *Ashek Kuldell* with sentience; it has an Intelligence of 13 and an Ego of 21. Its special purpose is the eradication of all things illithid. Anyone wielding *Ashek Kuldell* who is not hunting illithids must check Ego against the axe any time the wielder's combined Wisdom and Intelligence drops below 20 (see the intelligent weapon rules in the *DUNGEON MASTER™ Guide*); if *Ashek Kuldell* gains mastery, it forces the wielder toward the nearest subterranean access to hunt and kill illithids. If this requires a journey of many days or weeks, so be it.

*Ashek Kuldell* is a battle axe +3. Its power is anathema toward illithids: against illithid kin (ulitharids, vampiric illithids, alhoons, urophions, neothelids, or elder brains) the axe inflicts double damage, and against true illithids, the axe causes triple damage.

Furthermore, in melee against illithids and their kin, *Ashek Kuldell* severs one tentacle from an illithid target on a natural attack roll of 19, and on a natural 20, the axe severs two tentacles. Each tentacle severed inflicts an additional 1d8 hp damage upon the illithid and forces it to roll against morale at a -3 penalty or flee from the conflict.

*Ashek Kuldell* responds to its wielder's desire to shed magical light that is equal in all respects to that shed by the *urlamp* described above, with all the abilities and restrictions of that magical item.

**XP Value: 4,000 GP Value: 20,000**

### Chimes of Hiding

A chime of *hiding* is a hollow silver tube about six inches long. When it is struck, it sends forth psionic vibrations that act as "white noise," preventing illithids, elder brains, and other psionic creatures from psionically detecting any creatures initially within 20 feet of the chime when it was struck for one full turn. A dull thunk is also audibly noticeable when the chime is struck and could serve to draw attention to

the *chime* holder, as it in no way conceals those it mentally protects from normal senses. Fortunately, the *chime of hiding* functions for its full one turn duration even if its holder moves from where it was initially struck, but creatures that were not within 20 feet of the *chime* when it was struck are not psionically veiled if they come into the area of effect afterward. The *chime of hiding* can be sounded 3/day.

**XP Value: 1,000 GP Value: 1,500**



*Bruce once worked in biopharmacy and chemistry. Artificial DNA synthesis offered hints of fulfillment, but Bruce abandoned science for fantasy in October, 1995 and is now living happily ever after. You can view his website at <http://www.execpc.com/~cordell>.*

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# LITTLE RASCALS

## Four New Rogue Kits for Dwarves

by Steve Berman

illustrated by Pamela Shanteau

**THAT DWARVES LOVE GOLD** as much as the stunning sight of a mountain, this “truth” is often exaggerated by those who have not spent much time in their halls. Dwarves have a saying about greed: “To sit at Abbathor’s table” refers to those who suffer from a consuming lust for the royal metal (gold). Certainly some dwarven thieves have earned a seat at the avaricious god’s table, but not all dwarven rogues are so greedy. Here then are four daring rogue kits for dwarves who are motivated more by adventure and risk—or even civic-mindedness—than by a lust for gold.

### Delver

**Description:** A delver is a dwarven rogue who seeks the secrets of his people’s past. Some explore ancient ruins in the hopes of discovering artifacts that can illuminate mysteries of dwarven history. A broken piece of pottery painted with scenes of some centuries-distant battle is priceless to a delver. Some delvers are more sinister, seeking the riches that the ages have buried away.

A delver needs to be not only agile but also hale and hearty to survive the rigors of exploring old tunnels. Such characters must have a minimum Dexterity of 11 and a Strength and Constitution of no less than 13.

**Role:** These rogues are a driven lot, forsaking the comforts of a tavern, a full mug,

chambers, and cold rations that underground exploration brings. The promise of returning valuable items from the distant past keeps delvers hunting the most treacherous of old tunnels.

Delvers foster a network of like-minded merchants and scholars interested in their findings. Dwarven priests and aristocracy tend to be on good terms with delvers; they might not care for the dusty trappings of the delver’s calling, but whatever is brought back may better cement (or refute) the dwarven faith in a deity or a family lineage’s claim to greatness.

Player character delvers might find some solace in the company of the other player characters, but to non-dwarves, it seems that the delver often speaks too much of archaic times when his kin first learned to shape stone, telling tales of discovering the shine of gold, and recounting the thrill of battles waged generations gone. At times, no one else can understand the delver’s personal quest.

Delvers may be of any alignment open to Rogues. Their philosophy of archaeology is dependent on this nature and determines whether a delver views history as a legacy to be cherished or as a sort of scholarly treasure map.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** A delver learns to use weapons that can easily be wielded one-handed so that in tight situations he may still fight.

*Required:* None. *Recommended:* Dagger,





dart, hand axe, hand crossbow, short swords, sling.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** *Bonus:* Excavations\*. *Required:* Ancient history, mining. *Recommended:* Ancient languages, appraising, blind-fighting, endurance, local history, mountaineering, relic dating\*, rope use.

\* The excavations and relic dating proficiencies are described in the article "Great Excavations," appearing in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #241.

**Skill Progression:** Delvers should consider bettering their skills at Find/Remove Traps, Open Locks and Read Languages. All these skills would come most handy while exploring ancient ruins.

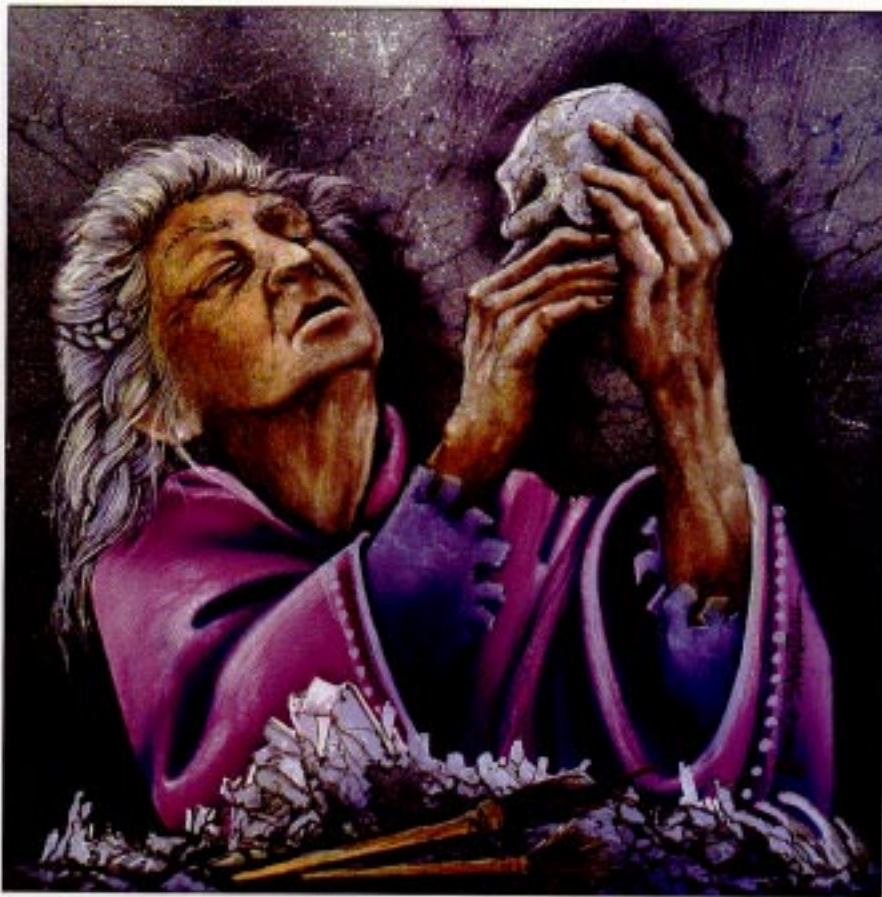
**Special Benefits:** Due to their experience spent exploring the oldest tunnels and halls, a delver has a better knack for determining the stability of a subterranean passage. On a roll of 1-5 on 1d6, the delver can determine unsafe conditions. He can also detect stonework traps, pits, and deadfalls (all used by dwarven architects in the defense of their homes) on a 1-5 on a 1d6.

Whenever applying their proficiencies toward an archaeological find, a delver adds a +1 bonus to the roll. This bonus can reflect anything from shoring up the support beams in any old tunnel (mining roll) to restoring some broken shards of pottery to reveal important ruins on the glaze. The player can describe whatever reasonable action the PC takes to gain this bonus, but the action must involve dwarven design to earn the bonus.

Delvers cannot read most magical scrolls, as can some rogues. They can employ only those protection scrolls that are scribed in dwarvish script (ancient or modern). Delvers gain this ability at 4th level and use it with no chance of failure.

**Special Hindrances:** Delvers are utterly uninterested in current affairs. When not exploring ruins, they are either resting from their latest excursion or acquiring supplies for the next task. These rogues rarely settle down; their lives are tied to old maps and rumors of buried strongholds. Their poor social skills mean they suffer a +1 penalty on all reaction rolls with any folk not similarly interested in the past (so sages, archaeologists, and the like would find common ground with delvers).

**Wealth Options:** 5d4 x 10gp



## Hoardsacker

**Description:** Hoardsackers are not interested in petty theft. These rogues are nearly obsessed with the notion of uncovering lost treasures stolen from dwarven hands by dragons. To a hoardsacker, the grandest of endeavors is to sneak into one of the beast's lairs and "recover" dwarven treasures from the wyrm's centuries-old mound of loot.

Needless to say, hoardsackers tend to be some of the more overconfident dwarves a person could meet in a tavern. Some truly believe in the service of reclaiming ancient wealth and returning it to its rightful families and lands. Others are no better than the drakes who stole the treasure initially and keep their own caches of buried loot from others.

Hoardsackers tend to be fairly charismatic ne'er-do-wells who enjoy the attention that the boasts of their larcenous tasks bring. The kit requires minimum Dexterity and Charisma scores of 13.

**Role:** Most "sensible" dwarven rogues consider the profession of hoardsackers too risky, not just because of the dangerous "victims"

from which they steal but also because of the blatancy of their acts. Certainly these daring dwarves want others to know that they are thieves but not stealers from dwarves, only robbers of the great hoards of dangerous wyrms. Hoardsackers never pass up the opportunity to boast of their profession and the fine distinctions between it and common thievery.

Word of a hoardsacker's visit to a village will bring out the local youths who are eager to hear of his tales and wonder if his next theft is to happen nearby. The rogues often take advantage of such renown by using the attention to secure cheap lodgings and even sometimes henchman for a particularly harrowing adventure.

A hoardsacker can find his services much wanted by his kin when they learn of ruins once belonging to long-dead dwarves. There may not be any dragons slumbering in the ancient tunnels, but *something* might have gathered a great deal of treasure, and a hoardsacker would be most useful in learning what creatures prowl the halls. Wizards too often have dealings with these rogues, not for material wealth discovered but to have a hoardsacker bring back some dragon



remains or moltings prizes as material components for spells and magical creations.

There are no additional alignment restrictions for hoardsackers other than the normal for the rogue class.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** It is not so much that weapons can aid the trade of a hoardsacker—after all, common blades mean little to a dragon's hide—as it simply is best to be armed for emergencies. Studded leather, elaborately decorated with spikes and stylized scales, is often specially ordered by hoardsackers, who can wear any type of armor while suffering the standard penalties to thief abilities. *Required:* None. *Recommended:* club, dagger, short sword.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** *Required:* Alertness, drake lore (new). *Recommended:* Appraising, intimidation, looting, mining, rope use.

**Skill Progression:** A hoardsacker should emphasize the skills of Move Silently, Hide in Shadows and Open Lock, since these are the most vital for his trade. These skills traditionally allow the hoardsacker to sneak into a dragon's den and loot it of the most precious of treasures quickly.

**Special Benefits:** As part of the hoardsacker's natural confidence, he receives a +1 bonus on saving throws vs. dragon fear. As he increases in experience, this bravado swells, and the bonus increases by +1 for every three levels of ability (+2 at 3rd level, +3 at 6th, etc.).

After encountering his first dragon of a particular type and surviving, a hoardsacker is entitled to a +1 bonus against breath weapons from that type of dragon breath weapon.

At 6th level, the hoardsacker may instill those around him with courage while facing a dragon, granting them a bonus against dragon fear. He must first speak to the intended recipients of the benefit for a number of rounds equal to his current saving throw bonus (four rounds for a 7th level hoardsacker). Afterward, one individual per level of the hoardsacker may gain +1 on their saving throws vs. the fear aura of dragons. This bonus lasts only for a single encounter but may be instilled in the same individuals again and again.

**Special Hindrances:** Most older dwarves consider the burglary of dragons' hoards to be a foolhardy

endeavor. Some believe that the activities of hoardsackers are the true cause for recent attacks on dwarves by dragons. When dealing with any old or venerable dwarf, a hoardsacker suffers a +2 on all reaction rolls.

A hoardsacker cannot reach the 6th level of ability without robbing an adult dragon's lair of treasure equivalent to 5,000 gp. To reach the pinnacle of his craft, 12th level, the hoardsacker must survive a grand theft from an ancient wyrm's hoard worth at least 20,000 gp.

**Wealth Options:** 4d4 x 10gp

## Scurr

**Description:** Most individuals see a scurr as a dwarven buffoon hired to entertain the human aristocracy much like any other jester. But this common stereotype is a facade purposefully cultivated by the dwarves, for scurrs are actually trained spies who use their place in court to overhear secrets and statecraft and report back what they have uncovered to their fellow dwarves.

A scurr must have a minimum score of 15 in Dexterity. Because of the need for quick thinking among such spies, a scurr must also have an Intelligence of no less than 12.

Scurrs rarely resemble the average dwarf. Some shave their beards and heads to appear less like their kin as well as more comical. The clothing is not the dour earth tones usually worn but rather bright colors with bells or sewn colored stones. At first glance a scurr may be taken for a Stout halfling with rough features.

**Role:** The life of a scurr is not an easy one. For most of the time, the dwarf must be performing, a lively engaging act that is certain to present the image of a unassuming fool. But ail the while, he must keep his eyes and ears open, gathering as much information for his true masters as possible. A scurr learns to be in the right place at the right moment, to happen upon talks of state and pass by secret meetings.

Not every court with a scurr is a despotic one. Many are allied with dwarven lands but still need watching. If the role of the scurr was ever uncovered, it would be quite detrimental to the dwarf-human relations—not to mention the scurr's hide.

Scurrs maintain a secretive guild in dwarven lands. Prospective members



are taken away from their families as youths when they show promise. They are taught over the years to hone their Dexterity, learn human tongues, and practice larcenous arts to become better spies.

Nearly all scurrs encountered attend a human court. A campaign with a scurr player character should include a strong element of courtly intrigue, but there is no reason that the scurr character cannot be away from the grand halls on occasion. Perhaps he is part of a noble's traveling entourage. Or his secretive role might have been discovered, and thus he is forced to flee, whereupon he meets the other player characters. Still, the character's role is one of intrigue and diplomacy, and this should not be forgotten lest the character become nothing more than an agile thief.

Because of their secret diplomatic cause, scurrs are lawful persons in nature. Most tend to be lawful neutral, keeping their emotions from being swayed by the events of the human court. Some are lawful evil saboteurs purposely placed in a regime to bring about its downfall.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** A scurr must have skill with small, easily concealed weapons, as most court jesters never bear arms. A jester's scepter may be used as a makeshift club. Armor other than padded armor worn underneath a scurr's colorful outfits is impossible to conceal. *Required:* Dagger. *Recommended:* club, dart, sap, short sword, sling.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** *Bonus:* Tumbling. *Required:* Intrigue (new proficiency), modern languages, signaling\*. *Recommended:* Cryptography, dancing, disguise, juggling, musical instrument, observation, reading/writing.

**Skill Progression:** Scurrs would be well advised to increase all of their thieving skills at a steady rate rather than specialize in one or two areas. Most of their thieving talents will prove quite useful at court.

**Special Benefits:** A scurr begins the campaign with an additional learned language. This is always the tongue of the area he was currently or last assigned to, most often a human language, perhaps a regional dialect.

Due to the buffoonish facade cultivated by scurrs, most folk tend to underestimate them, rarely considering



a scurr to be the true rogue he is. Thus, in terms of roleplaying events, most people discount a scurr character as a threat (but note that this situation can also be a hindrance, as the character's actions and voice are rarely considered important, even when they are).

Because of their training in agility, if a scurr has the space to prance about and use his tumbling proficiency, he may add to the success of any dexterous skill or roll that immediately follows his antics. After succeeding in his tumbling proficiency check, a scurr gains a +2/+10% bonus on any Dexterity-based action that immediately follows. This can be a thieving skill (the scurr rolls underneath a character and cuts his purse), a missile attack, an attempt to leap over a pit, or any Dexterity-based proficiency.

**Special Hindrances:** Whenever a scurr encounters a dwarf who is ignorant of the character's actual role as a spy for the dwarven nation, he faces significant prejudice. Dwarves who aren't "in the know" consider scurrs to be pathetic wastrels who injure their race's deep pride by cavorting for the sake of a human entertainment. A +4 penalty on reaction rolls hampers any

and all dealings with their kin. Even when the truth is learned, most dwarves still have trouble accepting the scurr's diplomatic role and suffer a +1 reaction roll penalty. Of course, a scurr's superiors and fellow guild members do not suffer such prejudice against the character.

Because of their focus on information-gathering and diplomacy, the normal racial hatred for the goblinoid races gives no combat bonus to scurrs; thus, a scurr gains no attack adjustment against such creatures.

Finally, the greatest hindrance to the scurr is his permanent exile from his kin. A scurr is denied the company of fellow dwarves while he practices his trade. Indeed, it is most likely that he will never see the grand halls of his homeland ever again. This can be an embittering experience, ripe for roleplaying.

**Wealth Options:** 5d4 x 10gp

## Talebearer

**Description:** Like human bards, a few dwarves travel the land seeking adventure, telling stories to their kinfolk of past glories and current tales. These are the talebearers, and they serve their fellow dwarves not only by



amusing the common folk but also by preserving their culture and heritage through the spoken word and often through their own heroic deeds.

Needless to say, a talebearer must have an Intelligence and Charisma of at least 12, in addition to the required Dexterity of 9 as a rogue.

**Role:** Talebearers are among the most beloved fellows to their kin. They are not treated as rogues by most dwarves; some might consider them troublesome rascals, but none deny they can tell an engaging story. To most other dwarves though, a talebearer represents the mouth of the past, someone who can bring back the old days as if they happened only yesterday.

Talebearers are constantly wandering the land. This not only allows them to see as many of their kin as possible, but also keeps their ears open for happenings among the dwarvish people. Some talebearers join adventurers who explore ancient ruins not far from dwarven lands, in hopes that the band might uncover more of their history.

A talented talebearer rarely ends up paying coin for his room and board. Even members of other races

find themselves enthralled by a talebearer's stories, for dwarven history is rich. One might hear of the deeds of brave humans, of the quarrels with the fey folk, and even a humorous bit on how the Stout halflings truly received their names.

Talebearers are by nature kind-hearted. They are almost always neutral good in alignment, though they may choose any alignment available to rogues.

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Talebearers are not renowned for their martial prowess. Many will not even wear armor, as it tends to present an violent image in other folks minds. *Required:* None. *Recommended:* Any allowed by the rogue class.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** *Required:* Ancient history, storytelling (new proficiency). *Recommended:* Ancient languages, etiquette, local history, modern languages, persuasion, reading/writing, singing, survival (hills, mountains).

**Skill Progression:** Talebearers tend to focus their talents on the skills of Read Languages and Pick Pockets. The latter is especially useful for entertainment purposes as tricks of legerdemain and sleights of hand fall under that skill.

**Special Benefits:** Much as a human bard, a talebearer has a talent for history and identifying objects of importance. However, the talebearer's area of expertise involves dwarvish history and culture. Thus, while examining anything of dwarven make and origin, the talebearer has a 5% chance per level of experience of identifying the item's past. The talebearer will know the artisan/maker of the item as well as much of its history. Magical items with a known history can be identified as enchanted, but exact abilities remain unknown unless they are prominent in the item's known history.

As rogues, talebearers can read magical scrolls. They gain this ability at 6th level. Because of the dwarven innate resistance to magic, there is still an additional 20% chance that the magic will not be released even if the scroll is properly read.

At 8th level, a talebearer can try to influence his audience through his words. With a successful storytelling proficiency roll and a full evenings time, up to a dozen listeners may be affected as per an *enthrall* spell. Note that this is not truly a magical effect, but listeners are entitled to a saving throw vs. spells to resist the effect. Talebearers should be careful when trying to influence others with this talent; misuse adversely affects dealings with those who resist the effect, and they might consider the talebearer manipulative and untrustworthy.

Finally, because of their interaction with the common dwarves, sharing the tales of their ancestors, a talebearer receives a -2 reaction modifier bonus when dealing with any dwarf of middle or lower class. He is also welcome, among dwarves, to reimburse any expense of less than 1 gp through the use of his storytelling proficiency.

**Special Hindrances:** As mentioned earlier, talebearers are not great warriors. They are not cowardly, however, but they know they are much more likely to diffuse a hostile situation through words rather than arms. They begin their career with only a single weapon proficiency; thereafter they learn new skill at arms at the same rate as the wizard class.

Because of their focus on dwarven history and culture, applying their proficiencies to other races is less effective, suffering a +1 penalty on all such rolls.

**Wealth Options:** 2d6 x 10gp



New Proficiencies

**Drake Lore:** This is a rare skill, as few humanoids have managed to amass much information on dragon-kind. Still, some have cobbled together enough stories and myths and even truths to be useful. With this proficiency, a character can immediately determine the age of any dragon from a sighting of at least one round. He can also determine the type of beast from its spoor. In any diplomatic dealings with drakes, a successful dragon lore roll adds a -2 bonus to reaction modifiers. The DM may even allow this skill to be used to understand a smattering of dragon tongue, allowing a language proficiency check at a -6 penalty.

**Intrigue:** The proficiency is well-practiced in the haunts of the aristocracy (courts, temples, and universities). Through the use of this skill, a character can learn the current politics of the area and practice some subversion to gain his own political agenda. Whenever he has dealings with another person for purely political matters, he must attempt a proficiency check. A successful roll gives the character a hint from the DM on the result of his machinations. He might learn that he has succeeded in securing the loyalty of another's underling or barred another from rising in station. A failed roll often gives misinformation; the character might think he has achieved some success but in actuality has fallen from a superior's grace or insulted the wrong person and hindered his schemings. In all instances of a character using this proficiency, the roll should be made secretly by the DM.

**Storytelling:** This is the skill of telling tales that can serve to enthrall, entertain, and even educate an audience. With a successful proficiency check, characters can engage listeners in anecdotes, narratives, and yarns. For a period of 24 hours after the

New Proficiencies			
Proficiency	Group	Slots Required	Ability Check Modifier
Drake Lore	Wizard	2	Intelligence -1
intrigue	Rogue	2	Charisma -2
Storytelling	General	1	Charisma
Player's Option Information			
	Slots	Initial Rating	Relevant Ability Score
Drake Lore	4	5	Intelligence/Knowledge
Intrigue	4	5	Charisma/Leadership
Storytelling	5	6	Charisma/Leadership

storytelling, the audience reacts favorably (-1 bonus on reaction rolls) towards the storyteller. A failed roll means that the audience grows bored or, at worst, offended. A character might also use this proficiency when he hears mention of a legend or myth to see whether he has any knowledge of the story behind such a tale.

Skills & Powers Options

If using the character point system of development detailed in *PLAYERS OPTION: Skills & Powers*, here are some additional advantages and penalties available to dwarven rogues.

Optional Advantages

**Beard Cache (3):** The character sports a long, full beard that has been specially groomed to allow a small hiding spot within it, able to hold something no larger than a small vial or bauble.

**Immunity to Single Poison (5/10):** A dwarven rogue may become immune to a specific poison. First he must have some resistance to poison already (at least +2 on saving throws). For 5 points, the character is completely unharmed to exposure to a single rare poison. For 10 points, the poison may be a common one, and the character gains an additional +1 bonus to saves vs. all poisons of its general type (ingested, injected, or contact.)

**Smell Fumes (5):** The ability to scent a whiff of harmful gases within 100 yards of the source. This includes natural gases (such as carbon monoxide or blackdamp encountered in mining) as well as poisonous and magical vapors.

**Value Precious Metals (5):** The dwarf can tell the quality (within 10% of its value) of a vein of precious metal simply by touch and glance. This ability also extends to worked gold art objects.

Optional Penalties

**Deep Dwelling (5):** The character is used to living underground, amid mine tunnels and carved chambers. Life aboveground is unnerving, leaving the character feeling unprotected. All initiative rolls by the character in such conditions are at a +1 penalty.

**Scountrel Reputation (3):** Other rogues consider the character untrustworthy, and all dealings with such folk suffer a +1 penalty on reaction rolls.



*Steve Berman might enjoy carousing as much as any dwarf, but he cannot grow a decent beard, handle more than two beers, or swing an axe to save his life, so he has to pay to get into all the best dwarven-run establishments.*

Thieving Skill Adjustments								
	Pick Pockets	Open Locks	F/R Traps	Move Silently	Hide in Shadows	Detect Noise	Climb Walls	Read Languages
Delver	-5%	+5%	+5%	-	-5%	-	-	-
Hoardsacker	-10%	-	-	+10%	+5%	+5%	-5%	-5%
Scurr	-	+5%	-5%	-	-	+5%	-5%	-
Talebearer	+5%	-	-5%	-	-	+5%	-10%	+5%

If the additional thieving skills from the *PLAYERS OPTION: Skills & Powers* rules are used in the campaign, consider that the delver and hoardsacker kits would have a +5% bonus to Tunneling and the scurr has a +5% bonus to Bribe skill rolls.





# WYRMS of the NORTH

## FORGOTTEN REALMS

# HAMMARUNTOSZ

## The Claws of the Coast

by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

**LHAMMARUNTOSZ**, the “Claws of the Coast,” is a famous and often-seen bronze dragon who seems to like the company of humans far more than most wyrms—even given the small but persistent numbers of adventurers who seize the opportunities provided by encounters with her to launch attacks on the wyrm. Her name brings to the fore something the Old Mage would like summarized before further revelations concerning Faerûnian dragons see print: how dragons are named.

### Draconic Names

Volo’s notes include some speculations on the naming of dragons, but it has been left to Elminster briefly to set things straight.

Dragons are vain creatures—in most cases, too vain ever to change their names when assuming new identities, regardless of how many foes they acquire or how ridiculous a reputation they develop. Draconic names begin with a “username” bestowed on them as a hatchling by a parent, sibling, or (if orphaned) either

human observers or the named dragon itself. Such names are usually added to over the years as sounds strike the dragon’s fancy, until many become overly long and well-nigh unpronounceable. Some dragons guard “secret syllables” of their name to confound hostile magics, or use a short form or even nickname (such as “Mist” or “Bloodbror”) exclusively.

Often a well-developed draconic name includes an echo or fragment of the name of a famous ancestor, or an unrelated wyrm the naming dragon desires to claim as a relative, or to be thought of as sharing characteristics with. For obvious reasons, such “namesake” dragons are usually deceased, though there have been cases where dragons seeking to “call out” ancient wyrms have taken on very similar names so as to enrage the missing wyrms into appearing.

This habit accounts for name syllables (endings, in particular) thought of as belonging to one gender, but in use by a wyrm of the other sex. Adventurers are cautioned never to try to guess the gender of a dragon

purely from its name. It also explains some of the confusions between one dragon and another, as sometimes bards inadvertently merge the deeds of two or more dragons, to feed the flames of growing legend.

The name “Lhammaruntosz,” for example, echoes the famous name of Lhammarar, a smallish and much scarred copper dragon legendary for his aggressiveness. Lhammarar was ultimately dragged down beneath the waves and slain by a dragon turtle during a fierce storm; it’s not known if he ever mated, and Lhammaruntosz is certainly no blood relation to him. Her name also echoes that of her mother, Tauntzoth, who in turn used the name of a male grandsire of gigantic size and reputation.

### The Claws of the Coast

Lhammaruntosz is a bronze she-dragon who runs a merchant shipping line along the Sword Coast. She’ll often appear when one of her vessels is endangered, which suggests she magically *farscree*s their progress. She preys on pirates and others who cross

her business interests, and her depredations alone have made the Nelanther passable to shipping in recent years. Reports of her fleet vary wildly depending on who's doing the telling, but most sources agree she owns over two dozen cogs and caravels and has buyers and cargo-escort agents operating on more than a dozen other vessels.

The kindly and inquisitive dragon Lhammaruntosz avoids combat with other dragons whenever possible, but she reportedly possesses very powerful magical items that can cause acid-ball explosions in midair to harm draconic foes.

Lhammaruntosz often delivers "fast mail" messages and small items by flying them from one of her agents (on a ship just put out to sea) to another (on a ship nearing port), dropping them on a line as she passes over the ship. She holds one end of such a "dropline" in her jaws; its other end sports a hook to catch in rigging or to be caught and secured for crew, and close above the hook is a mesh bag that can hold small, cloak-wrapped bundles of valuables. "Mother Wyrn" (as her crews have dubbed her) prepares and loads such lines by means of unseen *servant* spells.

The sailors who crew Mother Wyrn's fleet love the protection a dragon owner can provide and are proud of flying her "Scaly Eye" banner, though most other Coast sailors think their tales of a bronze dragon fighting for them, towing them away from shoals, or dropping messages to them are so much wild fancy. Merchant rivals aren't so quick to scoff.

## The Scaly Eye

The Scaly Eye banner, often seen on ships docked up and down the Sword Coast, is a long blue pennant displaying a single staring eye weeping a spreading fan of tears, above which arches an eyebrow. Both the tears and the brow, if examined closely, can be seen to be made of shaped representations of dragon scales. The artwork, reputed to be that of Lhammaruntosz herself, is impressive, not crude or amusing.

It's a measure of the growing reputation of the Claws of the Coast that certain vessels have recently been seen flying false Scaly Eye banners; the bronze dragon is known to have torn one such ship (a pirate vessel

masquerading as one of her fleet) apart at sea, and to have sent her sailors to forcibly persuade other ship captains to refrain from unauthorized use of her banner—unless, of course, they plan to turn ownership and administration of their boats over to her. (At least five terrified ship captains have done just that, including the well-known sea merchant Essegn Anarvible of Neverwinter.)

One of the High Captains of Luskan is thought to have crossed swords with the Scaly Eye ships in the past, but he seems to have made his peace with the dragon. Dark rumors of the confrontation and feud between Rethnor Redcloak and Lhammaruntosz abound, but hard facts on this topic have proven as hard to grasp as smoke.

## The Rise of Lhammaruntosz

The Claws of the Coast was a hatchling of the crazed she-dragon Tauntzoth of the Rocks, who dwelt in a cave on the bare, windswept Finback, tallest of the Whalebones. Savage and cunning, Tauntzoth slew or drove away all others of her kind as she grew older and spent her days winging far and wide across the Sword Coast North, slaying all large creatures who defied her or whose looks she didn't like.

Increasingly Tauntzoth became convinced that a mysterious over-dragon, whom she dubbed "the Unseen" because she could never find any trace of him, was stalking her, intending to enslave her and force her to bear his offspring—dragons who would be born alive and whole, and would eat and tear their ways out of her, killing her horribly.

No evidence for the existence of the Unseen has appeared outside Tauntzoth's mind, but to her, every creature was an agent of her "Dark Doom," except her own offspring (whose fathers she slew)—and, to her, they were rebels and potential rivals better slain anyway. One of the last of these unfortunate children seems to have been Rauthra, the future Lhammaruntosz, who spent her formative years spreadeagled and helpless in her mother's lair, anchored down by an extensive web of spell-reinforced chains and manacles.

Tauntzoth developed spells dealing with regeneration, experimenting with them on her hapless daughter. Her gift

for the Art was strong, and to this day Lhammaruntosz swiftly regenerates lost limbs and organs. (In game terms, this means the Claws of the Coast automatically regains 2 lost hit points per round whenever she is hurt, with two modifiers: the scales of her hide are slower to replenish themselves, leaving her with visible scars and vulnerable spots in her hide (-4 AC penalty to these spots only, until they heal); and once in every seven-hour period, she can by silent force of will trigger a "healing burst"—an awakening of body powers rather than a formal spell—that restores 6d4 hit points).

Tauntzoth regenerated even faster but couldn't resist augmenting her powers with ever-greater spells until her body grew a wild and endless succession of spare limbs, wings, headless necks, and tails, becoming a clumsy thing that was obviously "the Curse of the Unseen" come down upon her. This process accelerated for some seasons, until her body ultimately collapsed into a boneless mass.

In the final years of her life, the quickening and uncontrollable growth of her body made Tauntzoth a vast and horrifying monster, a cavern-filling mass of writhing flesh that was continually exuding new extremities. It also made her ache (or "burn," as she often howlingly described it) with continual hunger.

Her solution was near at hand: her daughter, the mistrusted and thoroughly cowed object of her experiments. Strengthened regeneration magics made permanent by the most powerful spellcastings allowed Rauthra to survive being eaten more or less continuously.

The young dragon spent at least two centuries as a chained, partly-devoured prisoner of her mother—and decades thereafter as an abandoned prisoner, kept from a death of despair and starvation only by her regenerative magics and her hunger to see the world outside her cave. With increasing frustration she awaited the failure of spell after spell until she could burst the last of her chains and win freedom at last.

This cruel rearing has left its scars; imprisonment and personal restraint are threats that make Lhammaruntosz go berserk even today, some six centuries after she first flew out of the Finback and left the horror of her mother's lair forever. The old northern



ballad “The Wandering Wyrn,” believed to have been the work of the halfling minstrel Aldersound Bucklebar, recounts a few incidents of her wide-ranging explorations of Faerûn at this time.

The Claws of the Coast spent almost four centuries wandering about Faerûn, fighting off and fleeing from all the hostile dragons whose domains she inadvertently entered. She owes her survival to her regenerative powers and her swiftness to flee; never interested in fighting for territory and possessed of very little personal pride, Lhammaruntosz never lingers to destroy a foe but simply strikes to defend herself, end an immediate problem, and be on her way again. She has shown a whimsical side and an impulsive desire to aid lone, beleaguered creatures—and her “swoop from the sky” rescues earned her fame in human lore and several outstanding aid-debts owed to her by such diverse folk as the mage Malchor Harpell, several senior Harpers, and the priest Tolgar Anuvien of Goldenfields. Her attacks substantially weakened the Broken Bone orc horde in 1024 D.R., and she was the mysterious “wyrn gliding by night” that plucked the shipwrecked explorer Havilar Culdorn (founder of the Blackbacks Trading Coster, forerunner of many of the wealthy trading houses of present-day Amn) from the waves of the Sea of Swords after the pirate-shattering Battle of Blazing Sails in 1211 D.R.

## The Claws of the Coast

Lhammaruntosz seems to have ended her wandering only recently, taking the “resting lair” (an open-to-the-elements, hoardless sleeping spot) of the old green dragon Skarlthoon. Known as “Snarljaws” because of her temper, Skarlthoon died in 1348 D.R. of some disease that ate away her scales and then the flesh beneath, covering her with creeping moss. The Claws of the Coast then seems to have fought some unknown dragon to the death and gained its inland lair; Elminster believes that this hidden hold must lie somewhere south and east of Secomber, in the broken land that marks the edge of the High Moor—and that its lingering magic is enough to make the wandering Lhammaruntosz feel secure. (She chose the Sword Coast from Neverwinter to Velen as her favorite haunt.)

This, in turn, allowed her to build a family to oversee and be part of: her merchant fleet, the ships of the Scaly Eye, which began to sail sometime around 1361 D.R., but only grew to prosperity and reputation after the Year of the Staff (1366), after her battles against pirates earned her the trust of merchant clients. Two keys to the success of the Scaly Eye were the two sisters Draeth: two fat and unlovely, but very astute, women from Leilon, Astlarthe and Dlareen. They brought the bronze dragon enough honest news and opinions of human doings and intrigues to fascinate her with the strivings of humans, and to make her want to be involved in such things continuously. The Draeths, though much crippled with arthritis, remain the most trusted, high-ranking, and important agents of the Scaly Eye. Based in Neverwinter and Mintarn respectively, they deal in cargoes and special handling agreements for their “Mother,” and can count on her personal protection and financial support in all they do. Beyond a hunger for the company of young and handsome men, they seem to lack vices and weaknesses—and after encounters with some watchful Harpers and a certain enraged bronze she-dragon, Luskanite rivals have learned not to try slaying them.

Today, Lhammaruntosz is a bronze dragon of what humans call “very old” years, sleek in build but often battered in appearance. Her craggy face is homely for a dragon and always seems somehow more kindly than majestic. The works of her mother have left her with a fear and mistrust of magic, but also with the determination that no one will ever be able to easily overcome her defenses and harm or enslave her with magic again, so the Claws of the Coast gathers all the magic she can, while avoiding both unnecessary spellcasting and all magical experimentation.

Lhammaruntosz finds it hard to trust anyone and keeps her own company; any need to share a small area with other sentient creatures for more than a few hours will make her irritable, suspicious, and constantly on her guard. At the same time, she feels a need to be accepted by a friendly group of beings who share a common purpose. (It is fair to say, Elminster and the “Dragon Sage” Velsaert of Baldur’s Gate agree, that the folk of her Scaly

Eye fleet serve as the family she never had—and that her mistrust of other dragons will probably ensure that she never does have a draconic family.)

Lhammaruntosz is gifted with a remarkable sense of direction and distance, honed by her years of wandering, and she can find her way to small and specific locations, even unfamiliar ones, in the dark and in poor weather, with a minimum of fuss and delay. She’s often come out of the driving rain of a howling storm, low over the storm-tossed waves, wings beating powerfully among the wind gusts and the lightnings, to check on one of her ships. Stricken vessels are promptly towed (all Scaly Eye ships are equipped with long, stout cables for this purpose, consisting of three ropes braided to each other to form one extra-thick length, which is anchored to “keel-trunks” set in the deck, and carried wrapped around the inside of the deck-rail) or abandoned, their crews snatched aloft after lashing themselves to one another.

Lhammaruntosz is also developing a shrewd sense of human nature and knows when she’s being lied to. The swindles and covert ways of merchants are becoming almost second nature to her, and she’s learned to hold her tongue in patience, to test would-be allies and business partners, and to set aside personal feelings when a long-time ally turns sour, or long-term treachery is revealed. This calmness and understanding of others led to the “Mother Wyrn” nickname (coined as a result of her rescues) sticking, even in the face of the fiercer “Claws of the Coast” moniker, which grew out of tavern-tales of her tearing apart pirate vessels to defend ships of her fleet. A slightly less respectful (or more unfriendly) variant of this, much heard among sailors, is “Mother Claws.”

Velsaert reports that the key to Lhammaruntosz’s character is her understanding of humans, but Elminster says her attentive, mother-like caring for other creatures—many other beings, not just a chosen few partners or allies—is what sets her apart from most wyrms. She hates pranks and deceptions of all kinds and is always analyzing folk and situations. Her actions may seem to occasionally be born out of imprudence or ignorance, but it is a mistake to assume so—she has almost always thought (and prepared) several steps ahead.

## Lhammaruntosz's Lair

Mother Wyrms has two homes—a hidden inland hoard-lair whose whereabouts are unknown, and a “resting lair” in a bowl valley in the heights of Orlumbor. She visits the inland lair only when she needs to take shelter from severe winter weather, retrieve magic, or hide and think or heal; she is almost always to be found on Orlumbor or on the wing, somewhere above the Sword Coast. She visits coastal agents and informants often, even alighting on the coastal rocks near Lathtar's Lantern every few days to talk to the gruff old retired fisherman Inglass Pholdaruk, whom she pays so well that he's been able to hire spies in many nearby villages to keep a very close watch over travelers, caravans, and local doings. As he put it, “I never thought I'd become someone important in my fireside years—but bless old Mother Claws, I have!”

Several Cult of the Dragon agents and ambitious adventurers have searched in vain for the inland lair of Lhammaruntosz. She may keep its entrance choked by a rockfall, for it's doubtful it has any defenders to keep folk out when she's not there. Nor do elaborate traps seem to be her style. What is certain is that it must hold some impressive magic items, because Mother Wyrms has swiftly produced such things from time to time, as conflicts dictate, and used them to telling effect.

## Lhammaruntosz's Domain

From Orlumbor, Lhammaruntosz ranges up and down the Sword Coast, avoiding the immediate vicinity of Waterdeep and Baldur's Gate, but going so far as to perch beside the walls of Neverwinter and Velen on occasion. Hardened against the ravages of exposure by her regenerative powers, the Claws of the Coast thinks nothing of hard landings or of simply stretching out on bare rock islets to wait out a storm, even when ice and snow cloak her resting form thickly.

Mother Wyrms doesn't think of this territory as her exclusive domain, as most wyrms do; she'll ignore or perhaps calmly greet and pass other dragons who treat her the same way, fighting only those who offer her battle, or attack her property, the Scaly Eye folk, or her friends.

## The Deeds of Lhammaruntosz

Lhammaruntosz doesn't need to eat much, but her childhood starvation has given her a loathing of hunger. She prefers to eat lightly but often and to vary her diet greatly, firmly deciding to try new things and never to adopt any “favorite fare.”

From day to day, Lhammaruntosz busies herself aiding, defending, and watching over the sailors, agents, and merchants who serve under the Scaly Eye banner. She seldom undertakes expeditions away from the Sword Coast these days and prides herself on being very well informed as to coastal news and events. Word of strange magic or armed bands engaging in open conflict brings her immediate interest—and often a “go and see” flight. Some folk are of the opinion that her presence and habit of swift response have kept forces of Luskan from infiltrating or openly attacking Neverwinter, and has kept Leilon safe from brigandry without its citizens lifting more than a few fingers in their own defense.

## Lhammaruntosz's Magic

Little is known of the spells wielded by the Claws of the Coast; they seem to be both minor and familiar. She even employs her natural abilities (such as polymorphing into other creature forms) very sparingly. On several occasions, however, she has unleashed an “acid-ball wand” in aerial battle. Elminster says this is an old Halruaan weapon more often used by the wyrms Malaeragoth (and he'll give us details of this particularly wicked wand with that dragon's chronicle next month).

## Lhammaruntosz's Fate

The Cult of the Dragon is increasingly interested in the Claws of the Coast because of her interest in human society, her profitable shipping fleet (which could be turned to enriching them, were she to become a dracolich under their control), and—most importantly—her regenerative powers.

Certain individuals within the Cult are secretly researching a means of magically achieving weredragonhood (that is, acquiring the means to temporarily take on fully-powered draconic shapes, when desired), so as

to use their abilities against not only the hostile world but against fellow Cult members, and rise from the lower ranks to rulership of the Cult. At least two of them (Elminster smilingly refused to furnish names) covet Lhammaruntosz's regenerative powers, seeing them as a means to virtual immortality for either humans or weredragon-humans.

Whether or not what aids her can be made to aid anyone else is a mystery “best left to the gods,” Elminster commented, “because it's a rather certain bet that no mortal knows.”

If Lhammaruntosz eludes the clutches of all the folk who want to get their hands on her powers, she still risks treachery at the claws of any dragon she dares trust enough to mate with; Elminster sees the chances of her developing any such trust as being extremely unlikely. This would seem to indicate a long and lonely life, with eventual destruction at the hands of a magically-powerful foe who can shatter her regenerative powers. The usual candidates for such villainy (such as the Brotherhood of the Arcane, Red Wizards, Zhentarim, and the Phaerimm) are all likely to see Mother Wyrms as a useful slave-steed, and to try to magically control her mind rather than destroy her utterly.



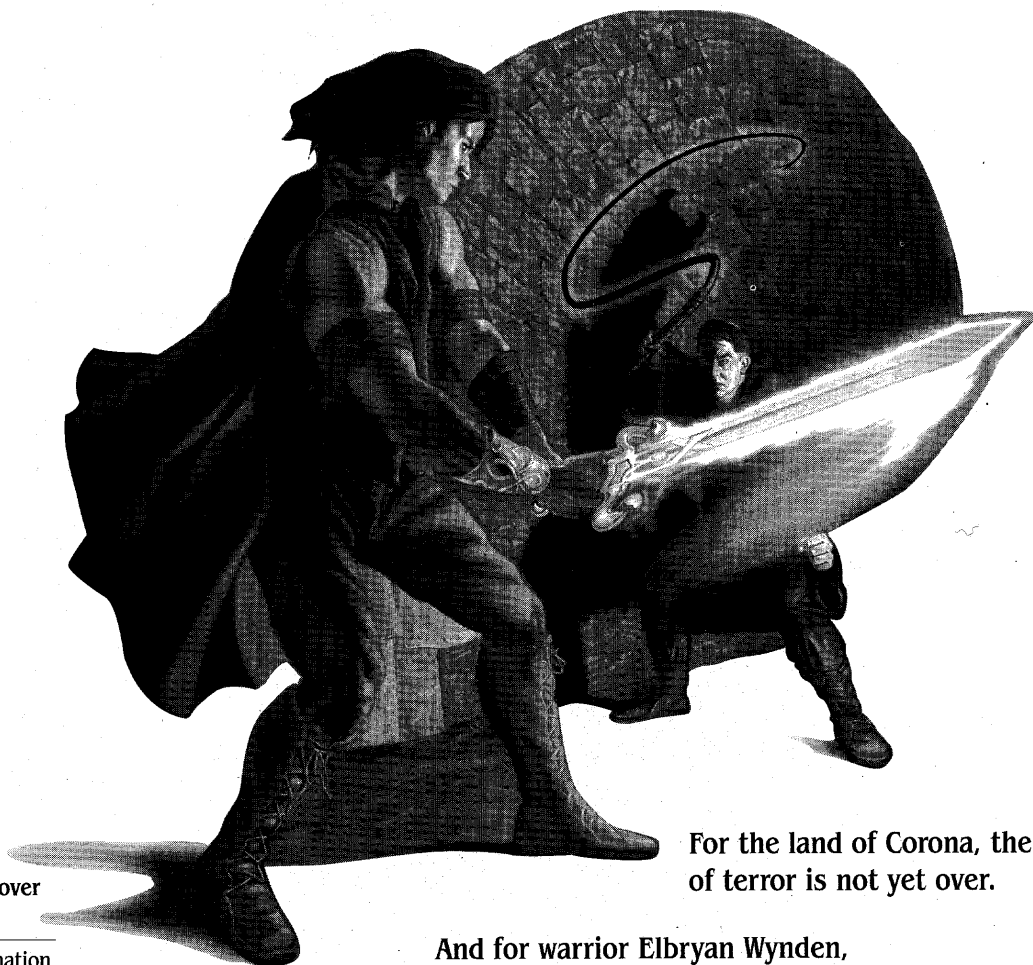
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# Honest and True

Troy Denning

*Artwork by Matt Wilson*

"THE TRUTH BELONGS TO THE FAST, Malik. Are you fast?"

So spoke Cyric the All on the Eve of Disaster, and in my Anguish, I could not answer. My tongue lay in my mouth as stiff as a corpse, and my thoughts bubbled through my mind like rivers of tar, and for that I was punished most terribly, as you shall see. But know also that the One came to me in my need, that he branded my face with the Searing Iron of His Glory, and that he did this so that the Divine Flame of Truth would always shine over the path of men.

I am the Seraph Malik el Sami yn Nasser, once a famed merchant of Calimshan and now Favored of the One himself, and this is my tale, in which I relate my struggle to publish an Honest and True account of how Our Dark Lord saved Faerûn (again). Praise be to Most Mighty Cyric the All!



The office of Still Harbor Press was as a tomb, cold and still and full of the soft rasp of scribes scratching their parchments. I sat near the entrance of the drafty room, my new Seraph's horns concealed beneath my turban, waiting for the master sage to finish my humble volume, *An Honest and True Account of the Trial of Cyric the Mad, or How Our Dark Lord Saved Faerûn (Again)*. He was poring over the last page, using some pittance of magic to hang it in the empty air before his face, so that I could neither watch his eyes devouring my luminous words, nor read his delight with such an astonishing tale, nor discern how far his offer might go toward restoring my battered fortune. I could only sit on the bench and try not to squirm, for book printers are all as greedy as dwarves, and the slightest show of eagerness will cause them to reduce their bid by a thousand *bicenti*. Nor was it easy to appear so indifferent, as I lacked even two coppers for a bowl of gruel and felt so hungry that I feared I would pass out.

At last, Bowden Boniface flicked his magic stylus, and the page slid down to his desk corner and fluttered into place atop the rest of my manuscript. The old man turned to stare out the window and did not look in my direction, a common trick used by merchants who wished to appear more reluctant than they were.

I stepped over and reached across his desk, as though to retrieve my manuscript. "If you have no interest in my tale," said I, speaking above the rumble of my empty stomach, "I am sure many book printers will gladly pay five or six thousand—"

Bowden slammed his hand down on my manuscript, causing the scribes behind him such a start that they smeared their work and filled the room with hisses and curses. He paid them no attention and hushed me with his finger.

I obliged him with a quiet smirk, for it was never easy to part with so much gold, and I was glad to give him all the time he needed. The book contained over five hundred pages neatly written in my own hand, chronicling the search for the Holy *Cyrinishad* and how these events caused the Great Circle of Twelve to place

Cyric on trial for his very godhood. As this story has been fully recorded in *The Trial of Cyric the Mad*, there is no use repeating it here, except to say the book exposes the One's enemies for the jealous liars they are!

At last, Bowden met my gaze. "Never have I read anything like this—this *thing* of yours." He tapped my manuscript, which was so far removed from the drivel he usually read that he could not think what to call it. "And to call it 'An Honest and True Account' is the most remarkable claim of all!"

"Also the truest," I said, and indeed it was, for I had lost the ability to lie. This was the accident of a treacherous truth spell Mystra had cast on the Pavilion of Cynosure and my own misfortune in being summoned there at the wrong time—but of course Bowden knew this, having just read *The Trial of Cyric the Mad*. "No doubt, you intend to pay handsomely for such an important work."

Instead of answering, Bowden flipped my manuscript over. He fanned through the pages more quickly than my eye could follow, then plucked one out and tossed it into the air, where it hung suspended of its own accord.

"Let them keep their temple to Oghma the Unknowing, their shrines to Deneir the Prattler and Gond of the Forgestinking Breath!" He was quoting from the page in the air. "What audacity!"

"The words are not my own." Though my reply was modest, I perceived by his florid face that my candor might be worth an extra ten percent. "I am only reporting what the One said."

Bowden flipped to another passage. "*And I knew her to be one of the Harpers, a band of meddling fools . . .*" He tossed the page into the air beside the first. "What gall!"

"As you know, I have no choice except to tell the truth."

By now, several scribes had drifted to the front of the office, and I saw by their furrowed brows that Bowden rarely grew so fervent. He snatched up his stylus, and a tiny flame appeared on the tip.

I frowned. "What is that for?"

Bowden turned another page. "*Adon screamed and flung his arms up before his eyes, for he had seen Mystra's true face, and now he recognized her for the murdering trollop she was.*" He tossed the last page into the air. "Blasphemy!"

He touched his stylus to the corner, and the whole page burst into flames.

"In the name of the One!" I cried, and even the scribes gasped at the old man's low act. "Have you lost your wits?"

"Sacrilege!" He touched the stylus to a second page, which vanished as quickly as the first.

"Stop!"

I snatched at the stylus, but in my half-starved condition was too slow to catch it. Bowden touched the flame to the third page, which erupted in a blazing sheet of orange, taking with it ten hours of eye-dimming toil and forty lines of genius.

A scribe caught Bowden's arm. "What are you doing?"

"I won't publish this offal!" The old man ripped free. "It's a sin that even I had to read it!"

He grabbed a handful of pages and flung them into the air, setting them afire one after the other. This was too much. I had spent two years writing *The Trial of Cyric the Mad*, tanning my own parchment and pilfering quills from the Meisarch's peacocks and mixing ink from my own blood, and I was not about to abide my books destruction at the hands of a mere paltering sage! I flung myself across the table and hurled Bowden to the floor and pounded his head against the planks as he deserved.

"I will show you sin!" I cried. "If you cannot recognize talent in this world, Cyric will show it to you in the next!"

The scribes gasped and seized me with a dozen hands, and all that follows happened in a blur: my hands came free of Bowden's throat, and I felt myself being lifted, and I kicked and clawed at my captors, and my turban came undone in the struggle and revealed my Seraph's horns.

Though the horns were only two years old and not yet an inch long, they were enough to convince the scribes they had a demon upon their hands. They rushed me out the door and pitched me into the street beneath a lumbering barrow wagon, and it is a wonder I rolled free with no more than a torn burnoose.

"Dogs and sons of dogs!" I jumped up to charge my attackers, and they slammed the door in my face. "Let me have my book!"

I tried the latch and found it locked. "Thieves! Plagiarers!" Though neither of the Blessings the One had bestowed on me as his Seraph involved great strength, I kicked the door with all my might. "Return my book! I will give you the count of three. One . . ."

Such was their fear of Our Dark Lord that the door opened at once. "Still Harbor Press does not plagiarize," sniffed one of the scribes. "Nor do we publish offal. If you want to see this filth in print, go see Aldo Manley and pay for it yourself!"

Out came a whirling cloud of parchment, blasting me in the face and scattering yellow pages across the muddy street. I gathered up an armful and saw that even these sheets were singed and charred.

I whirled on the closed door. "You do not know who you are dealing with!" I swept up another bundle of pages. "Cyric will avenge this insult!" And here, Mystra's treacherous truth spell compelled me to add, "If the whim seizes him!"

Now, any city as filthy and large as Waterdeep is filled with screaming lunatics, and it is the custom in such places to give these madmen a wide berth. The passersby parted around me as I scurried about gathering pages and ranting against my treatment and threatening all manner of godly retribution, and perhaps they even gave me more distance than usual on account of my Seraph's horns and the dizzy manner in which my hunger caused me to stagger. It was not long before I had recovered all but a few pages of my muddy manuscript, and I spied one of these last stuck to the wheel of a passing barrow.



I darted after the wagon, crying, "And you especially, Bowden Boniface, will curse the day you met me!"

I was answered by a chilling voice from behind. "And why is that, Malik?"

When I spun around, it was to see my worst nightmare emerging from the crowd: a Harper witch swaddled head-to-toe in dark cloth, her face hidden behind a black veil, her slender frame concealed beneath a heavy Bedine *aba*.

"Ruha!"

Still clutching my manuscript, I turned to dive under the barrow, and these quick reflexes were all that saved my life. A streak of golden magic blasted the wagon above my head, then the street erupted into a clamor of screaming voices and bellowing draft animals. I scrambled out the other side and rushed down the nearest alley and gave no thought to the pages I was trailing behind, for I had long ago learned never to allow Ruha a second attack. During the One's trial, she had hounded me all across Faerûn and nearly caused my ruin a dozen times, and I should not have been surprised to discover her in Waterdeep. Indeed, her presence explained the trouble I had encountered already, as only a Harper's interference could have caused a learned sage like Bowden Boniface to spurn my book.

"Malik!"

By the sound of her voice, she was at the mouth of the alley, less than fifty steps behind. I hurled myself into the nearest doorway, crashing through the flimsy door just as a web of sticky netting covered it behind me.

I found myself in the chambers of a seamstress, a withered old woman who sat at the window with her work across her lap. The room smelled of fresh bread, and despite my fear of the hell-hag hounding me, my mouth began to water.

"Is there another way out?" I demanded.

She pointed to an archway in back.

"Good." I dumped my jumbled manuscript into a basket by her side, then jerked the quilt from her hands. "Stand up and take off your dress."

The seamstress's jaw fell. "I will have none of that, sir!" She snatched a long hairpin from the bun atop her head. "What do you take me for?"

"Don't be silly, old woman." I slapped the hairpin aside, then pulled her to her feet. "I am interested in the wrapper, not the present."

I grabbed her shawl and draped it over my horns, then pulled her dress off and slipped it over my own shoulders, for one of the Seraph's Blessings Cyric had granted me was the ability to elude pursuers, provided I could effect a small change in my appearance.

I pushed the old woman toward the dark archway. "Go as fast as your legs will carry you! There is a harpy coming through the door, and she will slay anything in her path!"

By now, Ruha had arrived outside and was using her curved *jambiya* to cut through the web. I picked up the old woman's work and sat down to sew.

An instant later, the witch burst through the door. She turned to me at once, her kohl-rimmed eyes

narrowed in suspicion. I raised my brow and smiled as an old woman might, and Ruha stared at me until my chest became as heavy as an anvil.

Finally, the witch looked toward the dark archway. "Is that the way he went?"

I nodded, and at that moment my selfish belly betrayed me with a ghastly rumble. Ruha's gaze snapped back, and she furrowed her brow.

"Malik!" she hissed. "What are you doing here?"

Considering that I was hiding from her, this seemed an odd question indeed, and I perceived at once that she was only trying to divert my attention while she prepared a spell.

I leapt to my feet, crying, "As if you didn't know!"

She lunged at me. I hurled my sewing in her face, then felt her *jambiya* slash my writing arm. My fingers went limp.

"Harper shrew!"

In my fury, I grabbed a handful of *aba* with my good hand and spun toward the window and sent her crashing out into the squalid alley.

Any other time, I would have run like a coward, as Ruha well knew. But in mangling my writing hand, she had made me so angry that I pulled my dagger from beneath my dress and dashed over between the window and the door, and there I was waiting when she rushed back into the room. Instead of backstabbing her as was sensible, I lashed out and took her high in the shoulder. She dropped like a goat beneath a butcher's sword.

Thinking to rid myself of this harrier forever, I picked up her knife and stepped across her body, and that is when the harlot grabbed me where no stranger should touch. She gave a merciless twist and a brutal pull, and every man knows what anguish I felt then. It was all I could do to pry her fingers loose and stumble away. She began to gasp out one of her harpy's spells, which returned me to my good senses on the instant.

I kicked the chair into her face, then took up the basket where I had tossed my manuscript and scrambled through the window, fleeing with all the speed of any man who had just escaped a sure and certain death.



An hour later, I reached my lodgings in the Red Bucket Inn, which was surely the most disreputable lodging in Waterdeep. The place was so filthy that even the rats ate elsewhere, and the patrons were so detestable that not even the beggars spoke to them. But it had two qualities I valued above all else: a bed that cost only a silver *taran* a week, and a clientele that never intruded upon the affairs of others. When I entered the common room still disguised as the seamstress, no one uttered a word, and when I tore off the shawl and used it to bandage my arm, they only looked away and pretended not to notice my Seraph's horns. Leaving the old woman's dress to smolder in the fire, I took a table in the corner and sat down to assess the damage to my book.

The harm was worse than I feared; twenty pages were missing, and Bowden Boniface had scorched another fifteen into an unreadable mess.

"May a nest of wasps sting out his eyes!" I hissed. "And may that meddling Harper choke on a scorpion!"

"The sage I can do." The words came not in one voice, but in a thousand, all as deep and rasping as a grinding stone. "But not the witch."

I looked up to see a grinning skull across the table. Beneath his brow burned two black suns, while a film of crimson membrane covered his bony face and a black tongue wagged between his teeth, and his body was nothing but an undulating mass of vein and sinew.

"Mighty One!" I began to shiver, for the air always grew as cold as ice when Cyric appeared. "You have been watching?"

The One did not deign to answer my question. "Ruha is one of Mystra's favorites. If I touch her, it will set off a godswar—you know that. Why do you keep asking?"

"Every man has his dream, Mighty One."

"I have already made you my Seraph. What more do you want?"

I cringed at his sharp tone. "Nothing, Most High. Serving you is all I ask." Here, Mystra's accursed truth spell caused more words to well up inside me and spill from my lips, "Though I fail to see why I cannot do it with a decent meal in my belly and a handful of gold *bicenti* in my purse."

The One's eyes grew as hot as black fire. "I forgive that, but only because you are not the master of your own tongue."

"Thank you, Mighty One." I bowed my head at the One's mercy, for who knows better than a Seraph not to trouble his god with such piddling requests? "I will not allow such an idea to pollute my thoughts again."

At that moment, the innkeeper appeared unbidden and placed a tankard of sweet-smelling ale before the One and a whole roast pheasant on the table. I was much amazed, for the only meat the fellow had ever served me were the worms in my gruel.

The One looked up at the innkeeper, who stood by the table like a wide-eyed child. "Do you expect me to pay?"

"Never!" The fellow turned his miserly eyes in my direction. "I'll charge the meal to Malik."

I was too shocked to object, as I had not smelled anything so delectable in years—nor tasted so much as gruel in days. Still, I knew better than to serve myself before my god; I kept my hands folded in my lap and awaited his invitation.

Cyric tore the pheasant in two and began to devour his half with a great crunching of bones. I fixed my gaze on what remained and smacked my lips many times, but the One took no notice.

"Malik, your debacle at Still Harbor Press has caused me a problem." The bird's juice squeezed out between the One's naked teeth and spilled down his bony chin. "Oghma's scribes are writing their own version of my trial. If you do not print your book soon, they will beat you to press."

"Forgive my ignorance, Mighty One, for I have the foresight of an ass and the wits of horsefly, but what do you care? No one will believe their lies after reading the brilliance of my account."

The One rolled the black suns beneath his brow. "That's not how the truth works, Malik."

"It is not?" This was a revelation to me, as I myself had always been blinded by the radiance of the One's truth. "But a fact is a fact!"

Cyric shook his head. "Let us say you are walking beside a stream and find a diamond as large as your fist. What would this be to you?"

"A great fortune, of course."

"But if a small boy finds the diamond, he may throw it into the water. To him, it is only a rock."

Here, Cyric began to devour the second half of the pheasant. I let a cry slip my lips, but in his infinite mercy, the One ignored this outrage and continued to eat.

"Whoever says a thing first and loudest makes it so." Cyric spoke while he chewed, so that I saw the waste of all that food rotting in his mouth before he swallowed. "You must publish your account before Oghma's scribes finish theirs."

I did not suggest that the One use his magic to print the book, for he had nearly started a godswar when he tried something similar with the *Cyrinishad* many years before.

"How long do I have?" I asked.

"Not long. They will be ready to print in five days."

"Five days! It will take five days to replace what is lost!"

"The truth belongs to the fast, Malik." The One gestured at me with the scorched tip of a wing, all that remained of the succulent pheasant between us. "Are you fast?"

"I would be faster, had the witch not done this to me." I raised my bandaged arm.

The One glared at my wound. "Are you asking me to heal that?"

"Never, Mighty One!" I hid my hand beneath the table, for it would have been a great affront to ask Cyric himself to wield the filthy magic of healing. "But I must rewrite everything I lost, and the wound will make this difficult—as will my hunger."

"Only if you let it, Malik. We both know that."

Cyric was speaking of my second Seraph's Blessing, which was the ability to suffer any pain and still do all the One required. "All the same, it will take time to replace what I lost," I said. "The witch's treachery cost me thirty-five pages."

"Are you certain?"

"I know what is missing from my own book."

"Not the book, you fool!" The One's palm struck me so quickly that I never saw his hand move; I only felt something strike my temple, and my whole head began to throb. "The witch! How could she have known you would go to Still Harbor Press?"

I perceived the One's meaning at once. "That harri-dan! She has poisoned every press house in the city against us!"



"You are sure she did not come across you by chance?" asked Cyric. "She isn't here on other business?"

I shook my head, for now it was the One playing the fool. "If she happened upon me by chance, how do you explain the reaction of Bowden Boniface? Any sage who reads my book will be instantly struck by its truth and brilliance." Here, the One's eyes dimmed doubtfully, and so I added, "And if my narrative does not awe any reader, then the splendor of its subject will."

The heat returned to the One's eyes. "I see what you mean."

"Ruha is the cause of all our trouble," said I. "She has warned every press house in Waterdeep against my account. As long as she lives, I will never print *The Trial of Cyric the Mad*."

I did not say what the One should do about this, as he was a god and should have been able to see it himself. He fell silent and quaffed down the ale and licked the tankard clean with his long black tongue, leaving not a drop for me, then turned and hurled the empty cup at the counter.

"More!"

The tankard struck the inn's sole serving wench in the head, and before the poor girl dropped dead, the innkeeper was at the One's side with a refill—no doubt charged to my bill. No one said anything about the death of the wench, for only a fool would condemn the Lord of Murder for doing what comes naturally.

Cyric waved the innkeeper away, then returned his black gaze to me. "I have told you, I can't touch the witch. If you want her dead, do it yourself—and if you can't, go see this Aldo Manley."

"Aldo Manley!" I cried. My rebuff at Still Harbor Press was not the first time I had heard Aldo Manley's name, for I had blundered into his office my first day in Waterdeep. He was a swindler who convinced people to pay *him* to print their books, and he had wanted 3,500 gold *bicenti* to print mine. "My Lord, think what you are saying!"

Cyric regarded me coldly. "No, Malik. Think what you are saying. I do not care whether you make a copper on this book—that is not what matters."

"It matters to me!" This spilled from my mouth before I could think, but I did not care if it angered the One. "I have sacrificed everything for you. I deserve a profit!"

"Deserve, Malik?" The One glared at me. "Have I not always cared for you? Did I not punish the prince for giving you these?" He reached across the table to rub my Seraph's horns, though I have no idea why—he had planted the seeds in my brow himself, as a sign of his great Favor. "And did I not also punish your faithless wife for her part in the deception?"

"Only because they were distracting me when you did not wish it! And when the Caliph paid for their funerals with *my* fortune, you did nothing!"

The One recoiled as though struck. "Surely, you do not value your grimy treasure above your own god?"

The ice in Cyric's voice brought me to my senses, and I perceived that I would never win him over by

appealing to his sense of fairness, which was as lacking in him as knees were in a cobra. I bowed my head to show some dismay.

"I beg your forgiveness, Mighty One. What I meant to suggest was—uh—er—" I had intended to say no one would take the book seriously if Aldo Manley printed it, but instead I felt a great up-welling in my chest, and Mystra's accursed truth spell compelled me to say, "Even if I wanted to, I could not pay Aldo Manley to print a single copy."

"Come now, Malik. You are a persuasive fellow." The One leaned forward, so that his black eyes were inches from my face. "You can convince him to give you credit."

"I do not think so, Mighty One. He made it very clear that he requires payment in advance."

"Has he read the book?" Cyric did not wait for a response, for being a god, he knew the answers to his own questions. "He will make an exception—if *The Trial* is as good as you claim."

"But Aldo Manley does not care whether he prints pure gold or pure offal!"

The One only continued to lean upon his bony elbows and glare into my eyes, and I perceived that he was growing weary of my objections.

"I c-can always inquire, Most High."

"Now you sound like a Seraph." Cyric grew considerate and leaned back, wrapping his fleshless fingers around the tankard of ale. "Go ahead and sell your book, if you can. As long as you are first to press, I care nothing for what you make. But if you cannot beat Oghma's scribes, you must pay Aldo Manley."

"I will!" So loud was my exclamation that several patrons dared look in our direction. "You shall not be disappointed!"

"That would be best. You know what awaits if I am."

I nodded, for Our Dark Lord had always made plain that if I ever failed him, he would consider it a betrayal of my devotion and damn me to the punishments of the Faithless.

"Good." The One drained the tankard of half its contents, then pushed what remained across the table to me. "Do not forget, Malik. Five days."



Though it caused me insufferable pain to hold the quill in my injured hand, my Seraph's Blessing made it possible to write as quickly as before, and I labored every night to rewrite the missing pages, and every day I devoted myself to finding a printer whose mind the witch had not already poisoned against me. I wandered from press house to press house, begging the sages to read but a single page of my manuscript and see if its brilliance did not draw them onward like a bull by its nose ring. The kindest insisted that they never looked at uninvited manuscripts and had their scribes pitch me out. Others wasted my time by reading the whole account before they hurled it back in my face, spewing a hundred epithets too foul to repeat here. The cruelest read the first page as I asked, then shook their heads and pushed the manuscript

away, claiming that my writing had not drawn them on like any creature at all, save perhaps a turtle on a leash. These liars I abused as they deserved, swearing they would soon know the wrath of Cyric the All!

And all during these trials, I had to keep a constant watch for the witch, as she had wasted no time in finding a healer and coming after me again. I spied her many times, skulking through the streets, searching every face for mine, and once she had even hurled a stinking web of magic at my head. On account of this narrow escape, one night I demanded of the innkeeper the little bottle of poison he kept for unruly customers. I pushed a netmender's needle through the cork, so that the point would always be wet with venom, then sewed a small pocket inside my burnoose sleeve to keep my weapon handy. If Ruha ever trapped me where I could not flee, I would be ready.

So it was that I passed four-and-half miserable days, never going to bed at night until I had rewritten eight lost pages, then arising early the next morning to visit another ten or twelve press houses. But Ruha had always been there before me; no sage ever offered anything but mockery and abuse for my book, and so I found myself late on the last day still lacking a printer. I decided to try one last press house before going to Aldo Manley, for regardless of what the One said, I knew that such a thief would never grant me credit. I turned north toward Soothsayer's Way, heading for a small press house across the avenue from Aldo Manley, and I was only steps short of my goal when I glimpsed a dark-robed figure shadowing me across the street.

Cursing Ruha for the meddling witch she was, I shoved aside an old man and ran for the corner, but I had hardly taken two steps before a sharp hissing filled the air. I hurled myself into Soothsayer's Way and saw a net of hissing snakes sail past my head, then rolled to my feet and scuttled around the corner.

By the time Ruha reached Soothsayer's Way behind me, I had already pulled up my hood and used my Seraph's Blessing to vanish into the crowd. I glanced back to make certain the witch was not looking in my direction, then dashed across the street to my destination, Black Tiger Folios.

When I opened the door, I was assailed by such a stench of sweet smoke and musky perfume that my head began to spin. At the front desk sat a pipe-sucking sage who wore more gold than a caliph, and draped over his shoulder was a young woman in a flimsy gown. Behind them sat a dozen florid-faced scribes scratching furiously at their work, and none of these people were paying any attention to the wanton giggling that came from beyond a curtain in back. I saw at once that I had made a tragic mistake.

At the sound of my entrance, the sage looked up and took the pipe from his mouth. The young woman undraped herself from his shoulders and smirked at my gaping jaw, and if she cared that I could see through her gown like a window, she did not show it.

The sage's eyes dropped to the bundle tucked beneath my arm. "What do we have here? An author?

"A humble chronicler," I corrected, cracking the door to peer outside. When I saw the witch scanning the crowd before the office, I perceived that it was too late to leave, and that I had no choice but to turn and introduce myself. "I am the Seraph Malik el Sami yn Nasser. I am sure you have heard of me."

"Hasn't everybody?" The sage glanced at the woman and rolled his eyes, then reached for my manuscript. "I'm Hardwyn Hod. Lets have a look."

I left the door and passed my book over, and if my hands were trembling, it had nothing to do with Hardwyn Hod. The shadow of failure was looming large in my mind, and I could think only of the endless torments awaiting me in the realm of the Faithless.

Hardwyn laid the bundle on his desk and began to read, his gaze flying over my pages as fast as a falcon. I stood by his desk in case he produced a flask of acid or a torch or any of the other things that sages use on manuscripts they do not favor.

After a time, Hardwyn looked up from his reading. "This is good!" he said, and I saw at once that I had misjudged the man. He motioned at a chair. "Have a seat. Devona will bring you something."

And now, the smile Devona gave me was as charming as it was practiced. "Whatever you like, Malik. Champagne?" Her tone became a breathy purr. "Or something more potent?"

It is fortunate that I am a man of strong will, for after so many years of loneliness and hardship, her offer tempted me greatly—yet I knew better than to yield, as Ruha never failed to appear at the worst possible moment.

My answer came in a cracked voice, "Perhaps something to eat—and a flagon of milk to wash it down."

Devona's brow rose. "Milk? Like from a cow?"

"Or a sheep or a goat. It is the same to me."

She looked to Hardwyn, who laughed and passed her a coin,

"Don't stand there! You're looking at Black Tiger's next iconoclast!" He patted her comely flank. "Get the man his milk!"

Devona did as he asked, though she paused at the door to don a cloak over her flimsy gown. Hardwyn returned to his reading, stopping often to heap well-deserved praise upon my manuscript, and I saw that Hardwyn Hod was a man of great vision, and that his office was hardly the den of iniquity I had thought, but a bastion of liberty and free thought that would do great honor to my humble account.

No sooner had I perceived all this than Hardwyn stopped reading. "That's it," he said, shaking his head. "I've read enough."

Such a lump formed in my throat that I nearly choked, and I began to fear that I was wrong about the man. "But you have read only seventy pages!"

"That's all I need to." His voice was as calm as a well. "This will sell. We'll put some 'cuts of Devona and a skeleton inside; on the cover, maybe have her kissing a skull. It'll do great in Skullport, Luskan, places like that."

Though I could not see what woodcuts of Devona had to do with the One's trial, the shadow



of fear vanished from my mind, and my thoughts turned from the torments of the next life to what I might earn in this one.

"How much?"

Hardwyn withdrew two small purses from his drawer and tossed them on the desk. "Fifty lions. Twice what I usually pay."

Of course, this was a great insult—but I could hardly contain my excitement, as this was the first offer of any amount I had received. I took a breath and forced a scowl upon my face.

"I am looking for a hundred times as much." I reached down as though to gather up my manuscript, but then Mystra's spell welled up inside me, and these terrible words spilled from my lips: "Unfortunately, I must take any offer, as I am too pressed for time to go elsewhere."

A stunned look came to Hardwyn's eye, and for a moment he just sat there in confusion. After a time, he finally shook his head and reached into his drawer. "I'll go seventy-five." He dropped a third purse beside the first two, then gave me a toothy grin. "I wouldn't want my new iconoclast to feel abused."

I perceived at once that he would have given me at least five hundred, which was only a tenth what I wanted but a thousand times better than paying Aldo Manley, and that is when the door opened. I glanced over to see Devona backing into the room, the hood of her cloak pulled up and her arms held out before her body so that they were hidden from my sight. Had I not been so distracted by my anger at Mystra's accursed spell, I might have sensed that something was wrong and reached for my poison—but as matters were, I only pushed Hardwyn's paltry purses back across the desk.

"If you do not want me to feel abused, then stop doing it," I said. "My book is a true account. We both know it is worth far more."

"True account?" Hardwyn scoffed. "A peahen like you couldn't survive the first chapter!"

"You might be surprised," said a familiar voice.

"Malik is as hard to kill as any beetle."

Ruha had barely spoken before I whirled to face her, but by then she had already thrown off Devona's cloak and pressed her *jambiya* to my throat.

"What's this?" Hardwyn stood, upending his chair. "Who is she?"

"A meddling Harper." As I spoke, I pulled my hand into my sleeve and began to work my netmender's needle free of its bottle. "She has come for my book."

"She *has*?" Why Hardwyn seemed so greatly astonished, I do not know. "Then it really is a true story?"

"I would not call anything Malik writes 'true,'" spat Ruha. "But he is guilty of all he describes, yes."

Hardwyn's eyes dropped to his desktop, and I saw the value of my manuscript increase a thousandfold, and in my heart, I recanted every vile thing I had ever said about Ruha.

"Perhaps now you will pay my book's worth," I said to Hardwyn. "My price is five thousand gold."

"Five th-thousand?" Hardwyn gasped. "I'll give you

thirty-five hundred. That's all I have." To prove this, he pulled the entire drawer from his desk and placed it next to my manuscript.

"The book is yours!" I cried.

"Good." Hardwyn waved his scribes forward, then turned to Ruha. "Your business here is done. Perhaps you should leave."

"I can't do that."

Ruha whirled around, placing my body between herself and Hardwyn's scribes. Though my poisoned needle was free of its bottle, I did not dare attack; the witch was holding her *jambiya* so tightly to my throat that her death throes would open my gullet.

I looked to Hardwyn's scribes, praying they would distract the witch. "Save me!"

Hardwyn nodded, and the scribes started forward, and the witch surprised us all by standing her ground at the sage's desk.

"There is no need to shed blood." She ignored the men around her and continued to look at Hardwyn. "Perhaps you would like to print Malik's book at no cost?"

"I am not in the habit of murdering my authors," Hardwyn said, though he was intrigued enough to have his scribes hold their attack.

"Nor am I in the habit of killing them," Ruha replied. "But I must take Malik back to answer for his wickedness, and he will have no use for your gold in a sealed cell."

"Harper hag!" I cried, and it did not matter that Ruha pulled her knife against my throat so tightly that she drew a runnel of blood. "Do not think you can cheat me out of my fortune!"

I looked to Hardwyn. "You cannot believe a word she says! If she cares so little about my book, why has she poisoned every press house in Waterdeep against its brilliance?"

"Against its *brilliance*?" Ruha sneered. "Why would I do that? All the decent sages are laughing at you. They would not print your book if Khelben himself begged it!"

Only my fear of dying unpublished—and of the torments that would accompany such a failure—kept me from jabbing her with my needle.

The witch's gaze returned to Hardwyn. "What is your decision? It makes no difference to the Harpers if you keep your gold, and it is no good to Malik."

"That is for me to decide!" I protested, speaking to Hardwyn. "We have a bargain!"

Hardwyn ignored me and peered past my shoulder, trying hard to read the expression behind Ruha's veil. "Why don't I think this is a gift? You want something in return. What?"

"Not much—only a single page," she replied.

"Several sages have told me that Malik reveals the *Cyrinishad*'s location in his book."

Though Hardwyn had not read that far, his eyes grew as round as saucers; he knew as well as anyone that the *Cyrinishad* was the lost history of the One's rise to godhood.

"One page," said Ruha. "That is not much to ask for so much gold."

"The shrew is lying!" I gasped, giving no heed to the pressure of Ruha's blade against my throat. "The secret of the *Cyrinishad's* location is worth a thousand times the pittance you are paying!"

To my horror, Hardwyn shook his head. "This is not a question of money, Malik."

Seeing that the greedy sage was about to betray me, and that it would be better to die the rich author of an unabridged book than to anger the One by letting Ruha steal the most important page in the account, I pushed the needle up between my fingers and prepared myself to feel the sting of Ruha's knife.

But this was not to be, for even as I gathered my courage, Hardwyn returned his gaze to the witch. "This is a question of integrity. Ruha is asking me to censor one of my writers—"

"I am asking you to consider the evil you would unleash," she countered, and I could feel by the tension of her body against my back that Hardwyn had surprised her as much as he had me. "Do you know what would happen?"

"I can't concern myself with that," Hardwyn said. Seeing that witch was about to grow unreasonable, he reached down to gather up my manuscript. "My responsibility is to the truth."

"Your responsibility? You do not know the meaning of responsibility!" Ruha fixed her dark eyes on the sage, then hissed a breathy incantation and, with her free hand, flicked a sparkle of glass at my manuscript. Tiny forks of magic began to crackle over its pages, and the witch said, "I warn you, do not touch that book until I have the page I want."

Hardwyn hesitated, and in that moment I saw that Ruha would succeed with fear where she had failed with temptation.

"Hardwyn, pick up the book!" I urged. "She cannot stop you without freeing me!"

As I spoke, I was also reaching around to jab the witch's thigh, but I was not the only one moving, nor the fastest. Even as my right hand moved, Hardwyn was grabbing my manuscript, and the witch was lunging past me on the left, and the scribes were flinging themselves on her back.

My needle found nothing but empty air.

From somewhere beneath the writhing heap on the desk came a sharp crackling, then an acrid smell and Hardwyn's voice crying out in shock. I glimpsed a streak of Ruha's purple *aba* and leapt into the fray, thrusting my netmender's needle down through the tangle into her soft flesh.

There was a surprised grunt, so muffled and quick that I hardly heard it, then Hardwyn's chair flipped over backward, and the whole mass of tangled flesh followed. Being on top of the pile, I pushed off and landed more or less where I had been standing; the rest of the heap thumped softly to the floor.

The drawer of gold, anchored by its great weight, remained on the desk, but my manuscript was gone. I crawled onto the top and peered over the other side, expecting to find a mass of parchment pages

scattered over the floor. Instead, I saw Ruha's slender figure slithering out from beneath the heap.

"Stop her!"

Fearing the witch would cast another spell before the innkeeper's poison killed her, I grabbed one of the small purses Hardwyn had first offered me and flung it into her head.

The impact knocked Ruha to her belly, and the pile tumbled after her like a great forty-legged spider and swallowed her up.

Hardwyn Hod lay on the floor next to his overturned chair, my manuscript still clutched to his chest and his hands covered with burns from the witch's magic. He pushed himself up, then raised his forearm to stare at the torn scrap of purple *aba* pinned there by the broken end of a netmender's needle. Already, the appendage had turned into a black and bloated thing, and I could see the dark venom racing up toward his heart.

"In the name of Milil!" he cried. "The witch has poisoned me!"

Whether the scribes heard this is impossible to say, for they were already assailing Ruha with such a maelstrom of blows that I thought she might never rise—though I knew better than to think I would be that lucky.

Hardwyn rolled to his knees and raised his hands, as though to place my manuscript on his desk. For a moment, it appeared that he would succeed, but then a great cry erupted from his lips and he collapsed, slumping forward so that his head fell to rest on the very pages he had given his life to defend.

No man can imagine the anguish I felt then, for it would have been no greater were I the one dying. My fortune was at hand, but what good would it do me now? I had killed my only sage, and I knew I would never find another so late in the day—especially if the witch was not lying about what the other press houses thought of my book. I cursed Fate for a teasing harlot and Ruha for a meddling coward, then swung my legs to the floor and shoved Hardwyn Hod's drooling corpse off my book.

There was but one thing to do. The office of Aldo Manley stood just across the street, and I could feel Cyric's deadline pressing down on my chest as heavily as a kneeling camel. I threw my manuscript into the drawer of gold and rushed outside.

The afternoon shadows were already so long that it seemed dark, and Soothsayer's Way was crowded with clerks and scribes bustling home for their evening meal. I stepped into the street and started across, for a good Seraph never shirks the call of his god.



*Troy Denning lives in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, where he takes great pleasure in inflicting Malik's misadventures on the Alliterates, a group of fellow writers and designers who have all had experiences similar to those of Malik in Waterdeep.*





# The Heroes of the Trial of Cyric the Mad

by Troy Denning

illustrated by Rags Morales

THEY HAVE ANSWERED THE CALL of duty and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the mightiest gods of Faerûn. They have sacrificed their fortunes and their lives in the line of duty, masqueraded as beggars and madmen, dwelled seasons upon seasons in the cold wilderness. They have crossed the breadth of Faerûn in a single ride and lain helpless upon the altars of dark gods, braved insufferable torments in the name of faith, gazed into the naked eyes of oblivion and never blinked. They are the champions of the *Crucible*, the unwavering mortals who answered their gods' call and found themselves pawns during the Trial of Cyric the Mad.

Cyric, Prince of Lies, rose to godhood during the Time of Troubles, earning his power through cunning, murder, and savage betrayal. Never one to rest on his laurels, he sought still more power by creating the *Cyrinishad*, an evil artifact so insidious that anyone reading it became convinced that Cyric was the only god worth worshipping. When the Prince of Lies made the mistake of reading his own book, he fell prey to his own deceptions. Unable to think of anything

except himself, he began to foster his creed of strife and betrayal only among his faithful, and soon the Church of Cyric was devouring itself from the inside.

At first, the other gods of the Realms were content to stand aside and watch. But when an eerie calm began to settle over Faerûn, the gods of blight—Tempus the Warlord, Shar the Nightbringer, and Talos the Destroyer—accused Cyric of neglecting his godly duties. They called him to stand trial before the Circle of Twelve, charging that his madness threatened the very Balance upon which the survival of Faerûn depended.

*Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad* is the story of that trial—and of the mortal pawns who walked with the gods during those events. Many loyal worshipers dream of serving their deities on such quests, but the reality can be less than rewarding. The gods are incarnations of “pure ideas”—of intangible concepts (love, death, beauty, justice, etc.) that must ultimately remain mysterious to every mortal. Deities tend to see things from only one perspective—their own. More often than not, they interpret events

only in terms of what those events mean to them, and they can be quite surprised (and often unreasonably angry) when mortal servants express concern over more mundane matters—such as their own happiness or safety!

Those who would walk with gods will suffer for the privilege, as many faithful champions have learned.

Once a suitably unscrupulous merchant of Calimshan, Malik el Sami yn Nasser is one of Cyric's most faithful servants. After learning of the *Cyrinishad's* disappearance, he left at once to search for the sacred book, entrusting his beautiful mansion (and his lovely wife) to the care of another man. Cyric rewarded Malik's loyalty by making him the Seraph of Lies. (Being a seraph is largely honorary; a seraph is merely a special servant of his god, and any changes to his appearance or abilities are strictly at the whim of his deity.)

Malik's mortal nemesis is the witch Ruha. Outcast by the superstitious Bedine nomads as a young girl, she learned to control her magic from the desert hermit who raised her, then used it to keep the Zhentarim from enslaving her people. Today, she is favored of the goddess Mystra and a valued Harper.

A common thief turned royal ranger, Avner of Hartsvale gave his life in the service of his queen. During the Trial of Cyric the Mad, he became a pawn in a struggle between Lord Death and the God of Thieves, and now he is the undying symbol of their strife.



*Troy Denning is the author of Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad. He elevated Cyric to godhood in book three of the Avatar series, the New York Times bestseller Waterdeep (written under the pseudonym Richard Awlinson), and introduced Avner in the Twilight Giants trilogy. He first wrote about Ruha in The Parched Sea and again later in The Veiled Dragon. He is also the author of the first five books of the DARK SUN® series, the Prism Pentad.*

# Ruha, Harper Witch

## 16th-level mage

STRENGTH:	16
DEXTERITY:	17
CONSTITUTION:	15
INTELLIGENCE :	18
WISDOM:	16
CHARISMA:	16
AC:	7
THAC0:	15
HIT POINTS:	44
ALIGNMENT:	NC
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spell Use
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	5'5"

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Dagger (jambiya), sling.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Agriculture; animal handling; cooking; direction sense; etiquette (Bedine); healing; herbalism; reading/writing; riding, airborne; riding, land-based; seamstress; survival (desert).

**Commonly Memorized Spells:** Unlike Heartland sorcerers, Bedine witches seldom have access to exotic spell components. They shape their magic from the elements that rule their lives: wind (also air), sun (also flame), sand (also dust and rock), and (most precious) water. They are so adept at using these elements that they can usually create an equivalent to any Heartland spell. (To acquire this talent, the spellcaster must be raised and trained by a Bedine witch.)

The spells Ruha knows are too numerous to list, but she is 75% likely to know common spells involving (producing, utilizing, or affecting) sun (also flame) or sand (also dust and rock). She is 50% likely to know common spells involving wind (also air), but only 25% likely to know those involving water. Her spell progression is 5/5/5/5/3/2/1. She most often has these spells ready: *affect normal fires*, *burning hands*, *move sand\**, *sand quiet\**, *sand slumber\**; *dust curtain\**, *pyrotechnics*, *sand shadow*, *stinking cloud*, *whispering wind*; *clairaudience*, *fireball*, *gust of wind*, *Melf's minute meteors*, *sunscorch\**; *conjure sand lion\**, *dig*, *hallucinatory terrain*, *polymorph other*, *polymorph self*; *globe of invulnerability*, *move earth*, *summon wind dragons\**; *forcecage*, *sun stone\**; *river of sand\**.

\*From the *Arabian Adventures* rulebook.

**Appearance:** Ruha is in her early 30s. With dark sultry eyes, a dusky complexion, and sable hair, she is quite beautiful—though she hides her beauty behind a veil, headscarf, and long Bedine robe.

**Background:** Born to the desert nomads of Anauroch, Ruha has not had an easy life. She began to suffer visions of the future at an early age, prompting her superstitious tribesmen to banish her into the care of an old witch. Ruha returned to her people many years later, marrying into a tribe that did not know of her visions. Unfortunately, her



husband soon fell victim to an army of Zhentarim invaders. She joined forces with a Harper who had come to help the Bedine fight the invaders, and her magic proved invaluable in driving the Zhentarim away. After the battle, many grateful sheiks vowed to welcome her into their tribes.

The sheiks' hospitality proved no match for the ancient superstitions of the Bedine, however, and Ruha soon felt as alone and isolated as ever. She left Anauroch to join the Harpers and has since become one of their most valuable agents.

**Equipment:** Ruha's desert robe, or *aba*, serves as her spell book; she has embroidered her spells inside. She rides a hippogriff mount, Silvercloud, which she recently inherited from a friend in the Waterdeep Guards.

**Magical Items:** Ruha carries a *jambiya* +3, given to her by her mentor on her twelfth birthday.

**Role-playing Notes:** If PCs encounter Ruha, she will be too busy on Harper business to take much notice of them. Although Ruha will not turn her back on those in need, she expects people to take care of themselves and looks down on those who don't. During the time of Cyric's trial, she won the favor of Mystra, who is 90% likely to disapprove of any supernatural mistreatment the witch suffers. During those same events, she became the solemn enemy of Malik el Sami yn Nasser and will look kindly upon anyone who informs her of his whereabouts.



# Malik el Sami yn Nasser, Seraph of Lies

## 10th-level thief

STRENGTH:	11
DEXTERITY:	16
CONSTITUTION:	15
INTELLIGENCE:	16
WISDOM:	10
CHARISMA:	10
AC:	8
THACO:	16
HIT POINTS:	40
ALIGNMENT:	NE
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	-1 to enemy's surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Vanish, endure pain
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	5'6"

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Dagger, whip, sling, dart.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Animal handling (camel, horse); appraising; disguise; languages, modern; riding, land-based (camel, horse).

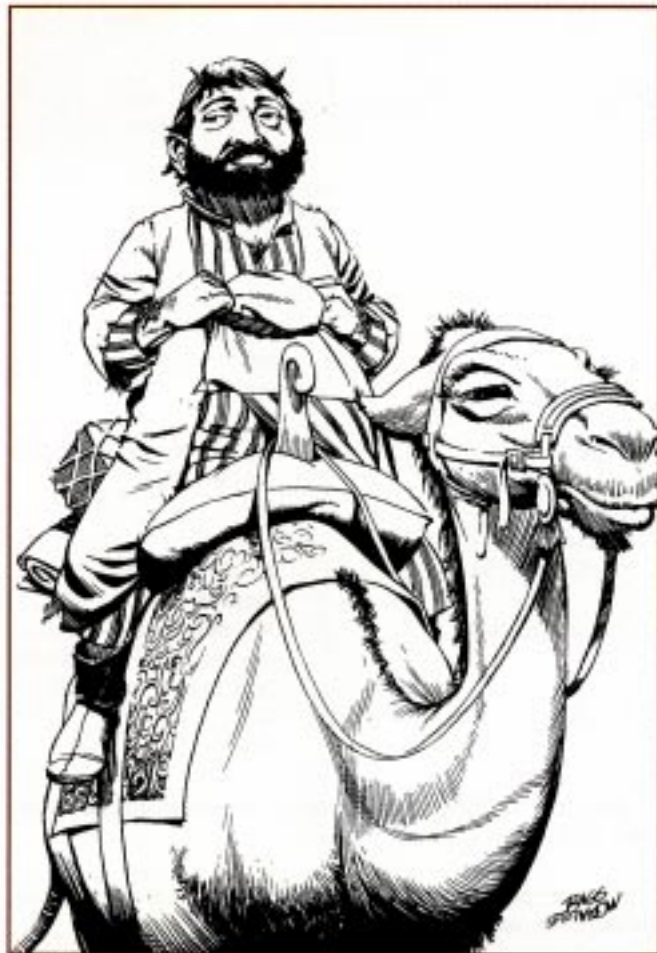
**Special Attacks:** On the first round of combat, Malik's enemies suffer a -1 modifier to surprise (even when a surprise roll is not normally made), reflecting Malik's talent for looking harmless in even the most dangerous situations.

**Special Defenses:** Cyric has granted Malik two Seraph's blessings. Endure pain allows Malik to ignore any pain that would otherwise prevent him from accomplishing Cyric's will. This blessing does not prevent damage nor enable him to do physically impossible tasks, only to continue despite his agony. For example, if he lost a leg, he could not run, but he could hop. Vanish allows Malik to elude pursuers, provided he can slip out of sight momentarily. When Malik wishes to vanish, make a Hide in Shadows roll; if successful, Malik cannot be found again for one full turn. He may attempt to vanish once per round.

**Divine Affliction:** Malik was accidentally exposed to a *truth* spell cast by Mystra herself. As a result, he can no longer tell a deliberate lie, either by deed or implication. However, he is free to say nothing and let others draw their own conclusions.

**Thieving Skills:** Pick Pockets 85%; Open Locks 72%; Find/Remove Traps 65%; Move Silently 88%; Hide in Shadows 68%; Hear Noise 30%; Climb Walls 95%; Read Languages 50%.

**Appearance:** Malik is short and pudgy, with bulging eyes and a soft round face that belies his ruthless nature. He has a pair of one-inch Seraph's horns growing on his brow, which he customarily conceals beneath a turban or hat.



**Background:** Malik el Sami yn Nasser was born to a hard-working merchant in the city of Najron, near the mouth of the River Ice in Calimshan. When his father vanished during a long caravan journey, Malik inherited the family business and became a frequent visitor to the Caliph's palace. When word arrived at the palace that Cyric's most sacred book, the *Cyrinishad*, had been stolen, Malik happened to be there. A devout follower of Cyric, he could not refuse the Caliph's request that he help search for the missing tome.

Malik managed to lay hands on the *Cyrinishad*, attracting the attention of both Cyric and Ruha. In gratitude for Malik's service during the days that followed, Cyric made the hapless merchant his Seraph of Lies (ignoring Malik's protests that Mystra's spell prevented him from lying).

**Equipment:** Malik carries a small dagger at all times.

**Magical Items:** Malik's horns cannot be removed by any means. Otherwise, they have no special powers.

**Roleplaying Notes:** The PCs might encounter Malik when they become involved in Cyric's machinations. Malik always works for Cyric's cause—though he also attempts to make a tidy profit on the deal. Generally, he attempts to manipulate others through flattery, fawning, or intimidation. If the PCs cross him, he threatens them with Cyric's curse, though this rarely results in any immediate harm. Should the situation turn dangerous, Malik uses his Seraph's blessing to vanish.

# Avner of Hartwick, Seraph of Thieves

8th-level thief/9th-level ranger

STRENGTH:	18/80
DEXTERITY:	18
CONSTITUTION:	18
INTELLIGENCE:	16
WISDOM:	17
CHARISMA:	18
AC:	0
THAC0:	12 (+2 Bonus to melee and missile)
HIT POINTS:	89
ALIGNMENT:	NG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Always surprises, fly, <i>teleport</i>
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Already dead—bestows partial spell immunity, and Return (see below)
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	5%
SIZE:	5'10"

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Dagger, broadsword, scimitar, long bow, short bow, sling, lance.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Firebuilding, set snares, survival (mountain), tracking.

**Special Attack:** Always surprises foes on the first round; fly (MV 30, class C); *teleport* with 100% accuracy twice per day.

**Special Defense:** Avner is truly dead (not undead). His condition bestows immunity to wizard spells below sixth level in the Enchantment/Charm and Necromancy schools and to all priest spells in the charm sphere. Spells that specifically affect undead do not affect him. *Raise dead*, *reincarnate*, or *resurrection* can return him to life (with all memories of his dead life). If reduced to 0 hit points, Avner turns gaseous and returns 24 hours later.

**Thieving Skills:** Pick Pockets 80%; Open Locks 77%; Find/Remove Traps 65%; Move Silently 80%; Hide in Shadows 66%; Hear Noise 30%; Climb Walls 95%; Read Languages 45%.

**Appearance:** Avner appears as a young man in the peak of health. He has shadowy wings on his back, and he usually dresses in black leather. His gray eyes have no irises or pupils.

**Background:** Avner grew up an orphan of the streets. He supported himself (and others) as a common thief, growing so skilled and bold that he often robbed the Lord Mayor's mansion. Eventually, Avner and his fellow orphans were adopted by a firbolg scout named Tavis Burdun. Under Tavis's guidance, Avner gave up his thieving and became a royal scout in the army of Hartsvale. He died defending Queen Brianna's newborn infant from a tribe of fomorian half-giants (as detailed in the *Twilight Giants* trilogy.)



In recognition of Avner's loyal service, Kelemvor sent the youth's spirit to reside with Torm the True. Mask complained, pointing out that the youth had never prayed to Torm, only to him, and demanding that Kelemvor punish the youth as one of the Faithless. Instead, Kelemvor claimed Avner as his own Seraph of Death. Later, when events surrounding Cyric's trial forced Kelemvor to reconsider Mask's request, he insisted that Avner be given a chance to redeem himself. Mask named an impossibly difficult task (detailed in *Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad*), declaring that if Avner could succeed, the youth would become the Seraph of Thieves. For once, Mask was as good as his word.

**Equipment:** Avner carries a full set of thieves' tools, including dagger, lockpicks, and soft-soled shoes.

**Magical items:** *Leather armor of the Seraph* +4 (Hide in Shadows at will, no penalty to thieving abilities); *scimitar of speed* +4 (create 10' circle of darkness at will); *shortbow of the night* +4 (no penalty for firing in darkness); *arrows of slaying* +3, one for each creature he expects to meet.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Avner is unhappy in Mask's service. He obeys the letter of the Shadowlord's commands but often ignores the spirit in favor of his own sense of fairness. He is not fond of thieves but sometimes provides assistance to those who must steal to survive or help others. Those who commit heinous acts during their thefts are more likely to meet him as a haunting angel.



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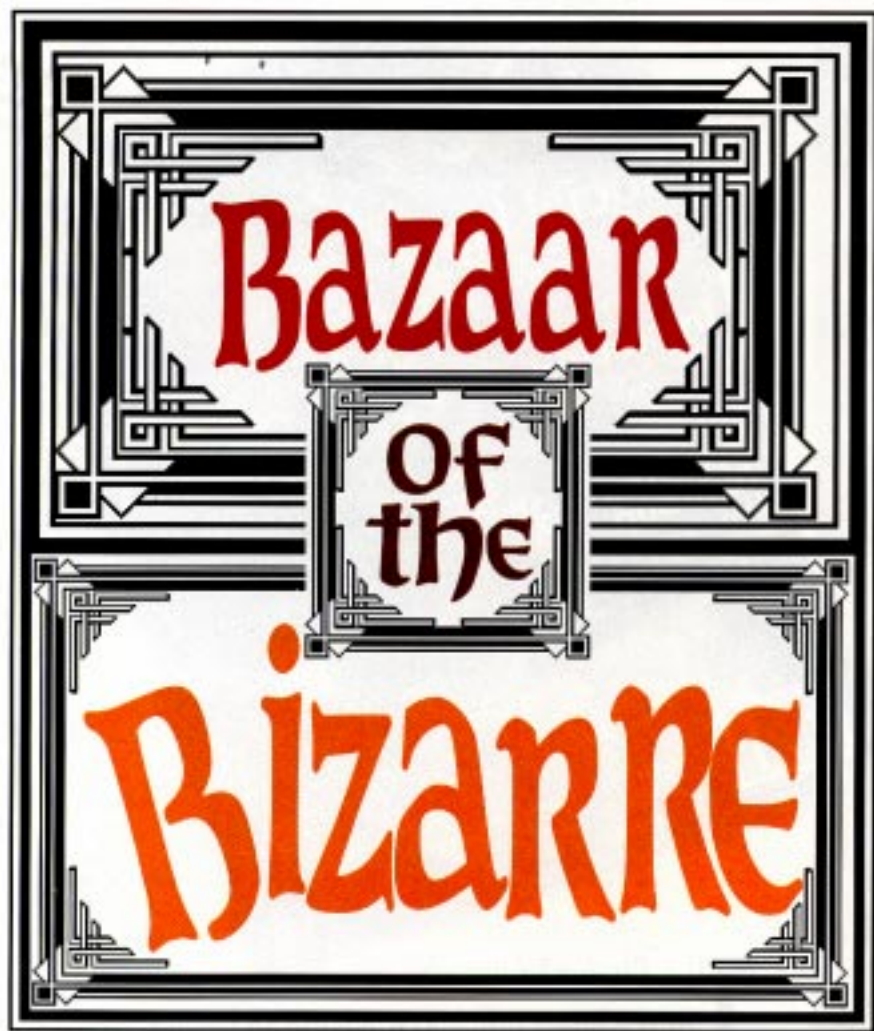
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## Dwarven Relics

by Kevin Melka

illustrated by Bob Klasnich

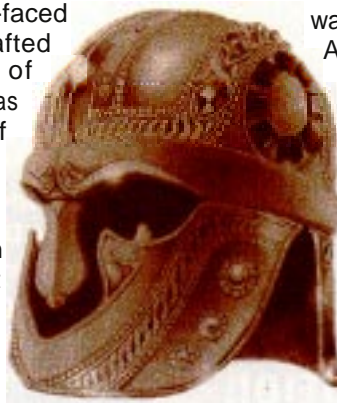
**THE MAGNIFICENT WORKS** of the dwarves are famous across the lands of virtually all campaign settings. While not always imbued with magical powers, the greatest relics of dwarven craftsmen are the physical representations of both the soul of the artist and the philosophies of the dwarven race as a whole.

Items of distinction are usually given to great kings and warriors, but many of them become lost or fall into obscurity among the waves of history. Legends concerning these fabulous works of art are passed down to dwarven apprentices perfecting their craft, but it is the adventurer who most likely discovers one of these dwarven relics.

### Helm of Agate Thorwallen

(**DRAGONLANCE®** Setting)

**History:** A full-faced dwarven helm crafted from the purest of mithril, this item has been the focus of many dwarven tales over the centuries. Agate Thorwallen was the first chieftain of Thorin, the earliest civilized center on Ansalon for the dwarven people. Agate's exploits as a warrior and a statesman earned him the title of chieftain



following the pandemonium wrought by the Graystone Gem 3,000 years ago.

It is unknown who created this magnificent helm, covered with gold and silver inlays of dwarven warriors and accented in precious stones. It was given to Agate by a mysterious smith upon his coming of age. Many say the helm was crafted by Reorx as an icon for the dwarven people of the time.

While the helm does not radiate magic, the polished mithril gleams brightly in even the dimmest of light. Despite its apparent lack of enchantment, it is said that even the keenest of magical weapons could not scratch the surface of the helm.

The Helm of Agate Thorwallen is probably best known for the love and loyalty associated with its legend. Carrying the huge responsibility of being the first chieftain of Thorin, Agate could not afford to leave his charge to fight in the Graystone Wars. In his stead he sent his wife Briggitt Slatebrim to lead the forces of Thorin. During the Time of Light it was not unusual for dwarven females to participate in battle.

As a symbol of strength and love, Agate gave the helm to his wife to protect her and to remind his troops that their leader is with them in spirit. Dwarven legend says that Briggitt, with the shining helm, returned victorious from the Graystone war with limited losses to her troops. All good fortune and praise in this case was given to the mithril helm.

In later years, to the despair of the chieftain and his wife, the couple produced no heirs. Following Agate's death, the helm passed to the next chieftain of Thorin, and so the tradition continued until the coming of the

Second Dragon War. When Thorin was sealed off from the rest of Ansalon, the Helm of Agate Thorwallen mysteriously disappeared. It is thought that a small group of dwarves, not wanting to be isolated from the rest of Ansalon, took the helm and left Thorin before the gates were sealed. Accounts are heard of the helm's appearance every few centuries, but never has it been returned to the dwarven people.

Despite its obscurity on present day Kryn, traditions surrounding the



Helm of Agate Thorwallen are still popular among the dwarven race. The gift of an ornate helm to a loved one leaving for war is still an honored custom. When a dwarven warrior falls in battle and his remains (for some reason) cannot be returned for proper funeral rites, comrades often endeavor to return his or her helm instead.

**Craftsmanship:** The temples of the Helm of Agate Thorwallen are decorated with circles of large precious sapphires, agates, and rubies. For reasons known only to the craftsman, the inside of the helm is encrusted with hundreds of smooth-cut diamonds. The remaining exterior is a mural of dwarven warriors engaged in combat with their greatest enemies from the Time of Light: ogres and dragons. The carvings of dwarves are inlaid with gold, while their enemies are in silver.

While not magically enchanted, the mere sight of the helm is inspiring to any dwarf. In addition, the helm provides a -2 AC bonus to any dwarf who wears it. (The helm fits the average dwarf's head). The burnished surface of the helm is not blinding to opponents but a beacon that acts as an inspiration to all dwarves fighting along side it.

**Value:** To any dwarf on Krynn, this renowned helm is priceless. The mithril used to craft the helm is worth thousands of steel pieces. While the gold and silver inlays are more decorative than valuable, the sapphires, agates, diamonds and rubies that encrust the piece are worth a king's ransom. Should the helm fall into the hands of some sinister looter, all attempts to remove the gems from the helm meet with failure. Only the most skilled dwarven craftsmen has any hope of prying the gems from their mithril settings, lending credence to the myth that the helm was created by Reorx.

## Moradin's Anvil

(FORGOTTEN REALMS® Setting)

**History:** Since the influence of the exalted dwarven god Moradin is far reaching, it is unknown exactly where Moradin's Anvil originated. While it might have spent time in the hands of dwarves across the Multiverse (with the possible exception of Krynn), the most numerous accounts of this dwarven relic place it on the Toril continent of Faerûn, in the hands of the dwarves of the Great Rift.

Dwarven legend tells a tale of two dwarven clans locked in a bloody conflict. Tired of senseless bloodshed, priests of Moradin from both clans petitioned their deity to put an end to the hostilities. In reply, Moradin sent his faithful servants a polished steel anvil and a blacksmith's hammer.

The dwarven priests believed a portion of Moradin's essence resided within the anvil, and that only by the will of the dwarven god could the surface be scratched. The nearly impervious anvil served as a symbol to all dwarves that only the will of Moradin could mar his own work, including the dwarves themselves. Henceforth, declared the priests, no dwarf should strike a blow to mar another dwarf; all disputes of any consequence to the dwarven people would be settled at Moradin's Anvil.

In the instance of the war-locked dwarven clans, the two chieftains were brought before the anvil to face a test called the Judgment of Moradin. The priests commanded each of the leaders to strike the anvil with all his might, using nothing but the ordinary blacksmith hammer. Moradin would favor the chieftain who could scratch the anvil's surface with one blow. If neither dwarf could mar the anvil's smooth exterior, it was decreed that Moradin sided with neither dwarf. To pursue the conflict or disagreement further would be to risk the wrath of Moradin himself.

Each mark on the surface of Moradin's Anvil tells a story of the dwarven people. The keepers of this great relic over the centuries have been the highest ranking priests of Moradin on Toril, Oerth, Cerilia, and select portions of the Outer Planes where followers of the dwarven deity can be found. Since the largest following is on Toril, Moradin's Anvil is typically found on Faerûn.

Moradin's Anvil is a great symbol of unity and strength for the dwarven people, who revere and awe this vessel of even a portion of their god's essence. Even the most courageous dwarven warrior or chieftain feels apprehension at the thought of being tested at Moradin's Anvil. Those who fail the trial of Moradin's Anvil are never again seen in the same light by

other dwarves. Exile from a clan and even banishment from all dwarven society have resulted from boastful and then failed attempts to mar the Anvil. The only thing worse than failing at Moradin's Anvil is refusing the challenge once the priests sanction the test.

There are currently 11 scratches on Moradin's Anvil. The most obvious of these marks, a deep gouge in the perfect surface, was made by the dwarf Jonto Delvestone. In the days prior to the fall of Myth Drannor, Jonto brought all the warring leaders of Great Rift together to put an end to their centuries of conflict and squabbling. To the war chieftain's surprise, they were brought not to a negotiation table but before Moradin's Anvil. Only Jonto, with the encouragement of the priests, was able to mar the relic's surface. By the will of

Moradin, Jonto put an end to all dwarven strife in the Great Rift and brought about a new era for his race on Faerûn.

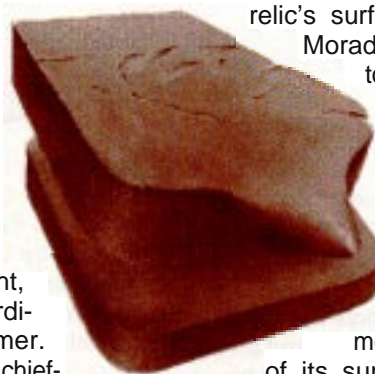
**Craftsmanship:**

Moradin's Anvil is made of fine steel, reflecting even the most superficial graze

of its surface. The hammer used to strike the anvil is of common quality, much like those found in the possession of any dwarven blacksmith. The only difference is the carving of a warhammer on the handle, the most common symbol of Moradin.

Moradin's Anvil does not radiate magic of any kind, but most theorize the reason for this is its unearthly construction. The fact that no item other than a specific hammer can so much as scratch its surface lends credence to the claim. If the anvil has other magical powers, they are unknown to the dwarven community. The priests of Moradin who safeguard the anvil do so with their very lives, and none may touch it but the most powerful of the Soul Forger's clergy.

**Value:** The worth of this item to the dwarven race is incalculable. Many believe the strength and singularity of the dwarven race comes from the anvil. Legend says that if it were ever lost or destroyed, all dwarven races across the Multiverse would plunge into a great civil war from which few would survive.



## Tomes of Gideon

(BIRTHRIGHT® Setting)

**History:** In the beginning, the dwarves of Kuldarzik (their name for Cerilia) were serene and diligent, not concerning themselves with the passage of time or affairs in domains outside of their mountain kingdoms. In a time long before the gods died at Mount Deismaar, a group of wise dwarves lead by the sage Gideon Rinsparr decided to keep a chronicle of the dwarven people. Gideon believed the dwarven view of history needed to be preserved for future generations.

At first these chronicles were compounded in a single volume, written exclusively in an ancient dwarven script. In later years one volume became many, and soon the Tomes of Gideon were created. It is believed that Moradin, the creator of the dwarves of Kuldarzik, personally watches over the Rinsparr clan and their work.

The Rinsparr dwarves have always been the keepers of the sacred tomes, and the writers of dwarven history. Even two millennia after the chronicles began, descendants of Gideon still pen the archives of the dwarven people. The Rinsparr clan travels to each of the various dwarven holdings once every two months to learn of the latest happenings of the land.

The "Rinsparr Observers," as they are called, record pivotal events for the Tomes of Gideon. These journals are then given to the head of the clan who transposes what he (or she) feels is most important into ancient dwarven script. In addition to the observers, there are elders, scribes who pen the actual text of the tomes; transcribers, who make a duplicate of the elder's work to be viewed by others; and protectors, who defend the Rinsparrs and their work from harm.

The Tomes of Gideon are located somewhere deep in the heart of Baruk-Azhik, unknown to most residents of that domain. Outside the Rinsparr clan, the only ones who know the true location of all the tomes is the Overthane of the land,

the provisional thanes, and the High Priest of Moradin. All penned originals and copies are heavily guarded, though copies of the tomes are allowed to leave the secret location. No originals or copies of the tomes have ever left the borders of Baruk-Azhik.

The Tomes of Gideon deal strictly with dwarven history. Only in rare instances are entries concerning the outside world recorded. Events

such as the destruction at Mount Deismaar and the death of Michael Roele

have been documented, but from a dwarven perspective.

The Tomes of Gideon are much revered by all dwarven nations throughout the world of Kuldarzik.

Dwarven history has become more significant with the coming of other races over the past millennia. Copies of original volumes penned by Gideon are used as teaching tools by many dwarven clans.

Families of importance across the domain often send their children to study from the sacred tomes. Clans of lesser nobility might wait years to have the opportunity to read the tomes. Unless a dwarf can read the ancient tongue of his people, a Rinsparr translator must be present to interpret the writings.

**Craftsmanship:** There are currently 24 volumes of the Tomes of Gideon, all constructed with the same dwarven elegance and workmanship as the first one made by Gideon himself. The tomes are each 12 inches wide and 18 inches high, and they are between three and four inches thick.

The binding of the tomes are sewn with gold wire, set with precious gems, and decorated with intricate carvings that indicate the contents of each volume. A tome's cover is carved by hand from the oldest of trees in the province, typically oak or maple, carved with artistic and distinctly dwarven designs.

The pages of the tome are made from the leathery hide of the varlhorns, a species of deer common to the provinces of Baruk-Azhik. Both cover and pages are then treated with

a mysterious dwarven elixir that allows them to stand the test of time and hold the scribes' ink to the page. More detailed lore may go into the crafting of a tome, but it's a secret heavily guarded by the Rinsparr clan.

While not as exquisite, copies of original volumes are made of more sturdy and conventional materials to stand the wear and tear of hundreds, if not thousands, of readers over the years. Original copies of the Tomes of Gideon are used only in rare instances. Duplicates are made from older copies of the same tome, never the original.

**Value:** Outside dwarven realms, the Tomes of Gideon, while still valuable, are useless to most non-dwarven readers. Written in the most ancient of dwarven languages, only members of the Rinsparr clan and select other thane families can translate the tomes properly.

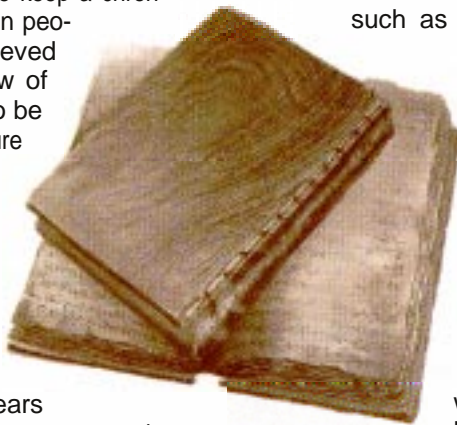
A stolen volume can be pillaged for its gold and precious stones, which are roughly valued around 5,000 gp. A thief of one of the tomes would invite the wrath of every dwarf on Cerilia should one of the tomes be despoiled in any way. At best, a quick death would be afforded to anyone removing even one volume from the sacred halls.

## Banner of Courage

(GREYHAWK® Setting)

**History:** During the height of the Suloise Empire, the dwarves of the Crystallmist Mountains were small and insignificant compared to the rest of Oerth. Numbering less than a thousand, this xenophobic race lost little when destructive magic shook the lands to the west, but afterwards thousands of Suel and Oeridians crossed their territory in search of new lands to conquer. The dwarves of the Crystallmist raised an army in defense of their territory, and at its head was the Banner of Courage.

Woven in threads of gold, silver, and electrum, the Banner of Courage is a symbol of strength, unity, and workmanship for dwarven warriors and craftsmen alike. No dwarven army lead by the banner has ever met ultimate defeat. They might have been slaughtered to the last dwarf, but in the end the followers of the Banner of Courage have fulfilled their duty, either by holding a position long enough to allow reinforcements to





arrive, or by destroying their opponents utterly.

The banner's superior craftsmanship is studied by young apprentices, and it is considered the greatest commodity ever to be born from a dwarven forge.

The exact origin of the Banner of Courage is unknown. Its creation dates back to a time when the Suel Empire was young, and even the oldest of dwarves can only speculate who crafted the relic and why. One legend that has held firm over the years is that the banner was made by an old dwarven smith known as "the First Blacksmith."

The tale of the First Blacksmith is an old one told by the dwarven clans of Oerth. The tale is mostly regional, adhering to western portions of the Flanaess, where the banner has most often appeared in the past. Legend says this dwarf was the first to learn the secrets of the forge by the gods, and it was he who taught the rest of the dwarven race the blacksmith's craft. It is said that before the Blacksmith could teach his fellow dwarves what he had learned, he had to create an item that would capture the spirit of dwarven loyalty and devotion. After meeting with several failures, the First Blacksmith finally created the Banner of Courage.

Currently, the Banner of Courage lies in the hands of the Ironrock Clan, located deep in the heart of the Crystalmist Mountains. The head of the clan, an honored, battle-scarred warrior named Cleft Ironrock, guards the banner in the best interests of all dwarves on Oerth. Cleft is the head of the Council of Clans for the dwarves of the Crystalmist, and his clan was chosen by the council a thousand years ago to guard the sacred relic.

The last time the Banner of Courage saw the light of the sun was during the ferocious Greyhawk Wars. In the midst of the chaos that surrounded the lands to the north and east, the fire giant clans of the Crystalmist decided to challenge their dwarven rivals for supremacy of the region.

Numbering over 700 giants (primarily fire giants, but hill and fomorian giants as well), the colossal force wiped out two entire clans before the dwarves could gather their forces in defense. As the giants made their advance into more populated

areas, the dwarves rallied behind the Banner of Courage and repelled the attacking giants with Cleft Ironrock himself carrying the symbolic dwarven relic.

**Craftsmanship:** Spun from gold, silver, and electrum threads, the Banner of Courage is so finely woven as to appear as cloth from as little as a few feet away.

The banner is primarily gold, with silver and electrum threads. A bright silver badge on the banner depicts an anvil surrounded by five brilliant, seven-pointed stars. While the significance of the anvil is apparent in relation to the dwarven people, the stars are not. No reasonable explanation has ever surfaced to account for the presence of the stars, or their strange configuration.

The superior craftsmanship of the banner is also a significant part of the dwarven blacksmith community. Never before has any dwarven relic exhibited such exquisite detail. The banner is put on display for blacksmiths and their apprentices once every decade, and dwarves from across the Flanaess come to view it. With permission from the Council of Clans, a dwarf considered to be a "master blacksmith" can make a request to privately study the banner. This session lasts no longer than an hour, and the blacksmith never speaks of what he or she learned from the experience.

**Value:** Like any relic of this magnitude, the dwarves consider it priceless from a monetary standpoint. An assessment of the banner's worth has never been determined. Few outside the dwarven race have ever seen the relic, except from across a battlefield. As far as anyone can tell, the banner is not magical. Its expert craftsmanship and great care has allowed it to stand the test of time.

The Banner of Courage's primary value is to inspire dwarves in combat and give heart to the dwarven art of metalworking. A dwarf fighting under

this ageless banner gains a +4 bonus to Morale, and those allowed to study the relic intently sometimes become blacksmiths of legend.

## Book of Kemalok Kings

(DARK SUN® Setting)

**History:** At the height of the Green Age, the dwarves of Athas were among the most powerful races of the Tablelands. From their majestic city of Kemalok, the dwarves grew strong and prosperous in the years prior to the coming of Rajaat and his evil followers. It was during this peaceful time the writings of the Book of Kemalok Kings were begun.

A personal journal written by the king of the dwarven people, the book is a combination of historical events and vital insight into the dwarven race. In a time when historical documents were nearly nonexistent, the Book of Kings was one of the few chronicles of Athas to survive the ravages of the Cleansing Wars. No single item on Athas contains as much rare history than this dwarven relic.

Following the death of Rkard, the last of the dwarven kings, at the hands of Borys of Ebe two millennia ago, the fallen monarch was placed in his sacred crypt along with the Book of Kemalok Kings. At that time, it was decided that until the threat of the sorcerer-kings on Athas was ended, no monarch would rule the dwarven race since he would likely be threatened by the Champions of Rajaat. Should knowledge from the book ever be required, the elder guardians of Kemalok would consult the ancient writings.

Like many other races following the Cleansing Wars, the dwarves of Athas lost considerable knowledge, history, and tradition to



the harsh conditions of the world. Among these was the ability to translate the Book of Kemalok Kings. For nearly a millennium, the relic gathered dust in the tomb of Rkard, its knowledge useless to those it was created to help.

Following the death of King Kalak and the liberation of Tyr, an Urkite historian by the name of Er'Stali sought out the elders of Kemalok in the city of Kled. Er'Stali told the elders he had uncovered ancient records in the library of the sorcerer-king Hamanu that allowed him to learn parts of their ancient written language. With this knowledge, he could translate portions of the Book of Kings and learn more of the ancient language. The Urkite was sincere in his intentions and became the first non-dwarf ever to set eyes on the age-old text.

Unfortunately, Er'Stali studied the book for only a short time before it was stolen by a psionist named Maetan, who took the book to Urik. At the same time, Rikus and his Tyrian army were mobilizing to engage the forces of King Hamanu approaching the newly freed city-state.

While in Kled, the dwarves told Rikus of the Book of Kemalok Kings and asked him to recover it. Rikus agreed, and in return he was granted the title of a Knight of Kemalok and was given two artifacts to help him in his quest: the Belt of Kings and the Scourge of Rkard. However, on his way to meet the approaching army Rikus was attacked by a dozen wraiths who were former followers of Borys of Ebe.

Recognizing Rikus as a Knight of Kemalok, along with his possession the Scourge, the wraiths agreed not to kill Rikus if he brought them the Book of Kings so they could use information within to find their former master. Spells placed on Rikus by the vile wraiths forced him to complete this task, and in the end the wraiths took possession of the dwarven relic.

Despite the loss of the Book of Kings, the learned Er'Stali was able to transcribe what he had read, preserving a portion of the ancient work. Er'Stali died nine years later in Kled, and it is unknown how much of the text was copied. Also unknown is the location of the Book of Kemalok Kings since the wraiths took possession of it. The crypt containing the undead warriors has since been

vacated, and the location of the book is unknown. Since undead and shadow creatures were altered during Rajaat's brief release from the Hollow, it is possible the relic may now reside on one of Athas's mysterious dimensions: either the Black or the Gray.

**Craftsmanship:** The Book of Kemalok Kings is not of exceptional construction, though it was made to stand the test of time. It is thought by some dwarves that the book stolen by the wraiths is actually a copy of the original, which has likely turned to dust over the centuries, though no one knows for sure if this is the case.

The book taken by the followers of Borys is constructed of braaxt hide and thick, leather-like pages of unknown origin. It has a nondescript look to it, being no larger than a tome found in any sorcerer-king's library. The book definitely shows its age, and if returned to the dwarves it would likely be re-copied in an effort to preserve the knowledge contained within.

**Value:** Following its theft from Kled the Book of Kemalok Kings has become well known. While focusing primarily on the lives of the dwarven race through the ages, the Book of Kings does present information on other incidents and events from the past—details on things such as the Time of Magic, the War-Bringer, and even knowledge on races lost to Athas during the Cleansing War. Many of the sorcerer-kings and other powerful parties are interested in the book, foremost being the Shadow-King of Nibenay who is always hungry for ancient lore regarding the scorched world.

## Prize of Erackinor

(PLANESCAPE® Setting)

**History:** Once every hundred years (or however a dwarf measures time on the Outer Planes) the dwarves of the fourth layer of Mount Celestia, the great craftsmen of the Electrum Heaven, hold a grand contest to see who is the finest artisan of the Outer Planes. Sponsored by Moradin himself,

the contest is held between the four largest settlements of the realm of Erackinor: Istor's Forge, Stonefall, Berronar's Side, and the Rift. The dwarves of these communities set forth their hearts and souls to produce the most exquisite, original, and detailed piece of workmanship, which in turn wins them the Prize of Erackinor. The Prize remains with the winners for the entire century, whereupon Moradin reclaims the item to award it to the new winners.

An exquisite brooch said to contain mystical powers, the Prize of Erackinor is considered, by planar dwarves and those Prime Plane dwarven craftsmen who know of its existence, the most distinguished object of the entire

dwarven race. Created by Moradin in a time when the dwarven race was young, the prize is presented by the dwarven god himself to the winner of the contest. It is one of the few times Moradin leaves the company of his sacred soul forge at the heart of Solania. The purpose of the contest, as far as the petitioners of

Erackinor are concerned, is to prove that their community is the most skilled. While an individual wins the prize, the entire settlement glows in the pride of the victory. Hence, a rather bitter rivalry between the four communities has developed.

While the Prize of Erackinor is an exquisite piece of work, it symbolizes for the perseverance of the dwarven spirit in the pursuit of perfect craftsmanship. Like Moradin's Anvil, the Prize contains a fragment of the Soul Forger's own essence, and those who wear the prize are touched by the god's own fiery passion for craft. Those who are not eventually driven mad by the possession of the prize become some of the wisest and most respected dwarves on the Outer Planes. From these dwarves Moradin typically chooses proxies to travel the planes or toil with him at his soul forge.

Entries into the contest for the coveted Prize are judged by past winners, if any still live; otherwise, a handful of Moradin's proxies serve as judges. In recent contests, the deciding vote has come from former winner Istor, ruler of the settlement Istor's Forge, who holds great respect in all of Erackinor.





In all cases Istor chose well, not once selecting his own settlement, because other dwarves presented superior work. It is a mark of Istor's reputation that his own people do not resent his choices, keeping their trust in his wise discrimination.

**Craftsmanship:** The Prize of Erackinor is a large gold and electrum brooch that glows with the light of the soul forge. None but a true dwarf (in body and spirit) can touch it and not be driven mad.

The Prize of Erackinor is crafted of golden leaves, a weave of electrum encircling it, and a crystalline center that glows with an deep amber light. It is said if the winner gazes deeply into the heart of the brooch, he can see the spirit of Moradin as he forged the dwarven race eons ago.

**Value:** In all the Multiverse, the Prize of Erackinor is the most cherished among dwarven craftsmen and those who value dwarven arts above other virtues. The brooch has never been successfully stolen or removed from Erackinor, and only a handful of planars outside of Mount Celestia have seen it. It is clear, to any dwarf asked, that the Prize of Erackinor has mysterious magical powers. While that may be true, none have ever been documented or revealed to any but the contest victor. Stealing the prize means risking the wrath of the dwarven god himself, and that is something few are willing to chance.

As for the entries into the various contests, they are typically collected by Moradin and granted to his proxies across the planes, to be used to further the Soul Forger's own purposes. Occasionally, the items are given back to craftsman, accompanied by some special quest from the dwarven god.

## Sarcophagus of Ran

### (RAVENLOFT® Setting)

**History:** During a time when the Demiplane of Dread was young, a dwarven stonecutter by the name of Ran Stonewalker was transported by the mists to Barovia. Ran was not wicked nor malicious and, for a time, wondered why he had been whisked away to the accursed land. It was then he met Strahd von Zarovich.

After the events that brought Strahd and his domain to Ravenloft, the depraved vampire needed a master stone smith to aid in the restoration and renovation of his magnificent

castle. At first Ran refused the request, and as a reward for his arrogance was transformed into a dwarven vampire under Strahd's control.

Ran served Strahd for centuries, and following the completion of the repairs and improvements, the vampire lord incapacitated Ran and left him in the sunlight to die. Somehow, Ran survived and made his way deep underground. Desolated at his undead state and finally free to act as he wished, Ran decided to create a tomb for himself, a prison in which to lock away the monster he had become.

Wanting nothing more than to end his tortured existence, Ran searched the Barovian mountains for the hardest stone he could find. After months of searching, he came across a large block of gray-black stone his dwarven skills could not identify. Regardless, the rock was more dense than any stone he had ever encountered, and over the next century he carved what would one day be known as the Sarcophagus of Ran.

With his tomb constructed, Ran found a dwarven adventurer traveling through Barovia who sympathized with this plight. Ran convinced his kinsman to bury him in the sarcophagus. Ran's new companion was not the most tight-lipped of dwarves, however, and he spoke carelessly of his strange bargain over ale with the Barovian villagers. Fearful the dwarven vampire would rise from his grave, the villagers tortured the dwarf to learn the location of Ran's grave, then attempted to unearth the sarcophagus. Following hours of digging, the sarcophagus and its contents were nowhere to be found. Since then, the Sarcophagus has reportedly appeared throughout Ravenloft, remaining only so long to provide a dire or hopeful omen before vanishing once more.

**Craftsmanship:** Despite originally being carved for a dwarf, the Sarcophagus of Ran can accommodate any humanoid under seven feet in height. The relic's surface is of polished gray-black stone of unknown origin. The stone's unusual consistency, texture, and near invulnerability suggest that the demiplane itself might have created it—although for what purpose remains a mystery. The few dwarves and stonecutters to examine the coffin cannot agree on how it was created or that it is even magical in nature.

The Sarcophagus of Ran is shaped like any common coffin, with the exception of its ornately carved lid and solid stone construction. The lid is completely covered in dozens of bas-relief scenes of a harmonious dwarven community. It is thought that these are scenes from Ran's life prior to Ravenloft, reflecting the peace finally achieved by the dwarf who entombed himself within the Sarcophagus. No body lies within the Sarcophagus, and the dwarves of Ravenloft say that Moradin himself reached inside to collect the body and spirit of Ran. All attempts to contact Ran beyond the grave have failed, fueling belief in this speculation.

**Value:** The Sarcophagus of Ran has relatively little monetary value. It is often sought by cursed individuals who believe it can somehow end their afflicted state. Tales of the coffin's supposed power have reached the ears of nearly every domain in Ravenloft, primarily through tales told by the Vistani in an effort to locate the item.

Some believe the sarcophagus to be an escape from the cursed domains of Ravenloft, but none can prove it. The Sarcophagus of Ran appears every few decades, then just as quickly disappears. It is common knowledge in Vistani circles that Strahd seeks the sarcophagus and will pay handsomely for it—or punish horribly any who dares to withhold its secret from him.



*When tiring of the human race, Kevin likes spending time with his German shorthairs puppies and riding his harley into the sunset.*



# THE ECOLOGY OF THE STEEDER

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Phil Robb

**GUNDARR CROOKNOSE** walked down the twisting passageways of the Underdark, trailing behind his mentor, Mordik, and the human slave they had brought along for the menial work. The slave, a ragged man captured by the duergar months ago, carried a torch and a pile of sacks. He shuffled along, weak from hunger and the demands of his present masters.

Gundarr reached up and slapped the slave on the head absently as they walked, spurring him on to faster speeds. "Move along, slave," he grumbled, but his mind wasn't really on it. Today was the day: he'd receive a mount of his own, and begin his training as an elite *kavalarach* — a spider-rider. It was an honor bestowed upon few duergar, for steeder mounts

required an outpouring of resources over many years, and each duergar community could afford to keep only a limited number in their stables. Therefore, steeders were reserved for the toughest and most deserving of the duergar warriors, and he, Gundarr, had proven his valor as a fighter time and time again.

The trio turned a final corner, and Mordik raised his hand to signal them to stop. "There," he said to his pupil, pointing to the end of the cavern ahead of them. "We've come just in time."

Gundarr pushed the slave to one side and peered ahead, eager to spot his mount. Instead, he saw only a pile of several dozen eggs, each about a foot in diameter.<sup>1</sup>

"What trick is this?" he snarled at his mentor. "Where is my steeder?"

"In time, Gundarr, in time. Watch, for even now she comes to greet you." As he spoke, several of the eggs pulsed, as the creatures within pushed against their tight prison walls with their legs and bit at them with their mandibles.<sup>2</sup> One egg split open, revealing the gangly newborn form within.

It was a giant spider, nearly two feet in diameter once it stretched out its eight hairy legs, each still dripping with slimy egg fluid. Orange-tan bands circled its appendages at the joints, and its eight eyes glinted glossy black in the torchlight. Otherwise, the creature's body was a dark gray, matching both the stone around it and the skin of the two duergar who watched it. It raised its first set of legs high and opened its mandibles, ready to strike.

Other eggs were breaking open. The newborn spiderlings crawled into their new environment, the black and gloomy Underdark that would be the whole of their world for their entire lives. Gundarr watched them spill forth with resentment and hostility. By all the gods of battle, he expected a fully-grown battle mount, not some tiny weakling fresh from the egg!

"We'll save the biggest three females," said Mordik. "The others go into the pot."<sup>3</sup> Gundarr drew his sword and started for the spiders, eager to spill some blood. "Wait," Mordik cautioned, "They'll do your work for you."

As if obeying Mordik's command, one of the newly-hatched spiderlings rushed at the first-born. As if sensing the motion,<sup>4</sup> the first-born spun around and met her enemy head-on. Their legs intertwined as they grappled for position, each spider trying to impale the other with its wicked fangs.<sup>5</sup>

1. Female steeders lay clutches of 10-40 eggs at a time, usually hidden in the backs of their burrows. The eggs are webbed together in an egg sac, which protects them from the elements and small predators. Unlike many spiders, this is the only time steeders use webbing. The female guards the egg sac until they hatch (usually about seven weeks), although sometimes the eggs are taken by the duergar and used as food.

2. Like many spiders, the steeder is born with "egg teeth," special ridges along its pedipalps (the small leglike appendages on either side of its mouth) that assist it in cutting its way through the egg. These are lost during the steeder's first molt.

3. In addition to being used as riding mounts, steeders serve as a food source for the duergar that raise them. Keeping a full-grown steeder takes time and effort, and the duergar are

careful to allow only as many steeders as they can use for mounts to survive beyond hatching stage. The others are slain and eaten.

Since female steeders grow to be larger than the males (this is true of most spider species), the duergar prefer to use females as mounts. A few males are kept alive at all times to ensure future generations—while also used as riding mounts, they are usually held back from battle. Many male steeders end up as beasts of burden, hauling carts back and forth through the streets of a duergar city. When strapped to a cart, the male steeder is unable to perform the lengthy leaps for which steeders are renowned.

4. Spiders have fine hairs growing over their legs. These hairs, called trichobothria, are each set into a pit with nerve endings on all sides. In this way, the slightest movement in the air shifts the position of the trichobothria, and the spider is

able to pinpoint the source of the movement. This specialized sense allows the spider to "see" around it in areas with little or no light, and makes sneaking up on one next to impossible unless some magical means of becoming ethereal is used. Invisible creatures cannot escape detection from a steeder (or any other spider, for that matter).

5. This is common after a hatching. It's nature's way to ensure that only the strongest and fastest steeders survive. Out of the original batch of eggs, only about half survive the initial feeding frenzy. The newborn spiders stop fighting only after there are enough dead to feed those still alive. After feeding, the survivors each go their separate ways and seek out a lair of their own, lest they be attacked by one of their siblings the next time he or she gets hungry.





As more spiders crawled out of their eggs and joined the battle, Mordik, Gundarr, and the slave watched carefully.

"All right, that one, that one, and, let's see . . . that one over there," said Mordik, pointing out the toughest fighters. Gundarr waded into the struggling spiderlings, cutting left and right with his sword, leaving a pile of bodies in his wake. Only the three singled out by his mentor were spared. The slave dragged the bodies to the side and started sorting them, obviously unnerved by the way their legs kept twitching, even after death.

The first-born had killed her opponent. Using her front pair of legs to keep the enemy at bay, she had set her four back legs firmly in place on the cavern floor and used her remaining pair to flip her foe onto its back. Then she leapt upon it. Her vicious mandibles slashed open the creature's unprotected underbelly. Blood spurted from the wound, staining the cold stone floor. The spiderling kicked feebly, and died. Only then did the first-born spin to face the two duergar and the human.

Gundarr had finished his carnage and was wiping the milky blue spider blood from his blade, a dark scowl on his face. Mordik helped to drag the dead over in a pile. The slave gingerly approached the first-born's kill, as if to take it. The creature immediately assumed the fighting stance. When the wide-eyed human made no move to back off, the steeder attacked, fangs open wide to devour this new prey. The slave screamed and backpedaled out of range.

"No, leave that one," called Mordik. "She's earned it." The slave backed away even farther, behind Gundarr, eager to be away from the living steeder. The steeder returned her attention to her prey and started feasting.<sup>6</sup> Nearby, her two surviving sisters each did the same.

"You didn't say I'd be getting a newborn," grumbled Gundarr to his

mentor. "How am I to ride something that small into battle?"

"You're not ready to ride into battle, Gundarr," cautioned Mordik. "By the time you are, your steeder will be big enough, never fear. All kavalrachni begin with a newborn. You will be no different. Now grab that sack, and let's go."

Gundarr gave his mentor a murderous glance, and stooped to pick up one of the two sacks filled with the dead spiderlings. The slave toted the other on his back. Gundarr slapped him in the side of the head for good measure on his way past, but felt no better for it. His mood was as black and evil as the Underdark that had spawned him.



Later that night, the two duergar sat in a warrior's den, drinking tall mugs of ale distilled from poisonous g'shnakki mushrooms. "How long until she can be ridden?" Gundarr asked of Mordik. "I wish to begin training at once!"

"Fool, you are in training!" laughed Mordik. "For the next year, you will remain close to your new mount. You will feed her. You will take your own meals in her cavern. You will sleep in her presence. In time, she will learn not to try to eat you. The two of you will form the bond necessary if you are to work together as one unit. After a year, when she has molted twice and grown large enough to support a rider,<sup>7</sup> only then will you ride your steeder."

"A year? I wish to ride now!"

"Should I find someone with more courage to make it through a year of hardship?"

Gundarr growled deep in his throat and slammed his fist down hard on the table. "I will be a kavalrach!" he snarled. "Question my courage again, and I'll rip the beating heart from your body!"

Mordik chuckled into his ale.



"What will I do here for a year?" demanded Gundarr. He and Mordik had taken Gundarr's mount to a small side cavern, sealed off from the rest of the duergar tunnels by a series of metal bars hammered into the floor and ceilings. Access was through a barred cell-door. The room inside was cramped. From the rear of the cavern, a slow but steady dripping foretold a year of cold, wet, misery.

"I have already explained. You will bond. She will learn to tolerate you. In return, you will no doubt learn to sleep lightly," Mordik chuckled to himself. "You will also have time to practice your mental disciplines, to master the meditations you have been taught in order to boost your psionic potential."

"What about food?"

"Every two weeks, the slave will be sent to feed your mount."

"Every two weeks? What about me?"

"There is a small pool of water in the back of the cell, and I believe some of the fungus in your cell is edible."

Gundarr scowled. "I do not laugh, Old One."

"Good. Kavalrachni must be a hearty lot. Surely the thought of roughing it for a year isn't souring you on the idea? If you lack the courage, I can find another to take your place . . ."

Gundarr's scowl deepened. He bared his teeth, but said nothing.

"Good. I leave you to it, then. Good luck, Gundarr. See you in a year—unless you beg for release before then." And with that, Mordik swung the door closed and latched on a thick padlock. Gundarr watched him leave, equal parts hatred and determination burning in his eyes. He ground his teeth. His hands clenched and unclenched into fists at his side, as if he could feel Mordik's throat in their iron-hard grasp. It was almost a relief when the steeder attacked him, slamming him face-first into the bars. He whirled around in time to grasp the creature's mandibles, already poised to pierce his midsection. Blood pooled

6. Steeders have no poison attack, but this does not mean that they have no venom. Like all spiders, the steeder has venom glands leading to its fangs, and while weak enough to prevent it from being used in battle, after the prey has been slain the venom is coated over the victim's body. It begins to dissolve the softer tissues of the prey, liquefying them so the soupy mixture can be sucked back up by the steeder. The process is a slow one, and steeders do not like to be interrupted during feeding.

After the victim is dissolved, all that remains are the harder structures: bones, teeth, exo-

skeletons, carapaces, and any clothing, armor, and items carried. These items might be found in a "wild" steeder's lair; those domesticated by duergar or other species tend to have such valuables taken from the lair. Treasure means nothing to a steeder in any case.

7. Steeders continue to grow throughout their lives. Like all arachnids, they have hard exoskeletons which do not grow in size. Instead, once the creature becomes too large for its exoskeleton, it molts: the exoskeleton splits down the middle and the steeder shrugs out of it like a hand

pulling out of a glove. The new layer of exoskeleton underneath is somewhat softer (the steeder drops to AC 5 for a full day immediately after molting), but hardens quickly.

Steeders molt twice a year for the first two years of life. After that, they continue to grow but at a slower rate, molting once a year for several years, then every second or third year after that. Male steeders live for about 35 years, and females occasionally reach 50, although this is rare—they are usually slain in battle before that.



in his torn palms, spilled to the floor. The pain kept him focused. He devoted the whole of his attention to wrestling the creature off him and subduing it without causing it permanent damage. His brain shifted focus: gone were thoughts of Mordik, replaced by thoughts of survival, of how best to sleep without being devoured during the next year.

Battle had always been good for Gundarr's peace of mind.



"Now watch," said Mordik to his apprentice as he slowly approached the steeder. He carried only a metal spear, which he held upright as a staff. As he neared, the creature turned to face him, keeping her eyes on him.<sup>8</sup>

The duergar started tapping with the butt of his spear. He set up a rhythm, repeating it over and over as he closed with the steeder. She in turn remained transfixed, allowing his approach.<sup>9</sup>

She had grown in the past year, molting twice as she outgrew her own outer skin. Now about four feet in diameter, it was time to begin her training as a riding mount.

Gundarr had grown as well, not in stature but in maturity. He was no longer the impatient hothead eager for the immediate gratification of his desires. The year spent in isolation had hardened him, focused him. Months of forced combat in close quarters and a limited food supply had burned off any excess fat, leaving only layers of rock-hard muscle. His gray eyes were colder, more intense. They darted all around him, constantly taking in his surroundings as if to make up for a year of the same old sights. He stood straight and proud. He was a survivor.

Spear still tapping a tattoo upon the stone floor, Mordik stepped up to the steeder, then slid over to her side. There was a crackling of mental energy as Mordik used his innate enlarge ability to increase his size. His body, armor and spear expanded equally in all directions until the steeder's body reached just above his knees. He straddled the beast, then reduced in size until he was sitting comfortably on the creature's back, on the part where the cephalothorax meets abdomen. He tapped the same rhythm on the creature's back as he sat there. "And that's how you do it," he said to his student.

"An animal friendship spell would have been much easier," said Gundarr.

"Only if you want to be dependent upon a spell each time you wish to ride a new mount. And if you have the proper materials, and the hour to cast the spell. You won't always have those luxuries in the heat of battle. No, it's best to get them used to being ridden without spells. Train them once, and they're yours for life. Now you try it."

Mordik dismounted and passed the spear to his student. If he was going to learn to ride his steeder, this was the first step. Gundarr took the spear and started pounding it on the ground.

"Not too hard or too fast," cautioned Mordik. "You must get it just right, if you want her to remain still while you mount. Break the rhythm, and she'll turn on you as you approach, no matter how well you've bonded. Slow down. That's it."

Gundarr slowed the tempo and made it successfully to the steeder's side. He enlarged, climbed on, then grinned with pride. "Got it!" he said, reducing back to his normal size.

"Tap!" shouted Mordik. "Don't forget to tap!" It was too late. Gundarr

had ceased tapping and the steeder was no longer receptive to advances. Unable to reach its own back with its mandibles or any of its legs—it leapt.<sup>10</sup>

The creature landed on the cavern ceiling. Gundarr was not so lucky. He fell off the beast in midair, landing hard on his side and rolling over a few times before coming to a stop. The spear went clattering down the corridor.

"It's a good thing she was fed last week,"<sup>11</sup> said Mordik, shaking his head sadly, "or you'd be spider food right about now." Gundarr groaned and looked up at the steeder on the ceiling, front legs raised straight out in the defensive stance as if concerned that the young duergar would somehow follow her up to the ceiling and attack. Her body touched the cavern ceiling, her six other legs bent well beneath her, ready to spring her forward into pitched battle. Her deadly mandibles were spread wide open, ready to deal maximum damage to any who would oppose her. Her hair stood on end, eagerly sensing any motion her glistening black eyes might fail to detect. The steeder was otherwise motionless.

"Fetch the spear. We are done today," suggested Mordik. Gundarr sighed, dusted himself off, and complied with his instructors command. The steeder remained on the ceiling, observing them both.



"The day has come for the creature's first saddle," Mordik informed his student. Their human slave stood hunched over under the weight of an elaborate leather construction. Numerous straps hung down from all directions. "Saddles are an important part of a kavalrach's equipment," Mordik continued. "Without them, the

8. Steeders have eight eyes. Two of them are rather large and face forward. The other six are arranged in a semi-circle, three on either side, around the top of the steeder's cephalothorax. These simpler eyes are only used to detect movement, whereas the larger two provide eyesight equivalent to that of a dwarf (including 60' infravision).

9. The rhythmic beating plays a part in the steeders' courtship rituals. The male beats on the ground with his pedipalps, declaring his interest in the female. As he approaches, he shifts the object of his tapping from the ground to the female's carapace, then interlocks his front legs with hers, rears up, and hooks his legs over her fangs. Once she's in position, he transfers sperm from his pedipalps (placed there earlier, well before the courtship dance began) to a seminal receptacle in an epigastric furrow underneath the female's

midsection. That done, the male scrambles to safety, since he's performed his function and is now expendable, at least in the eyes of the female.

The duergar take advantage of the preprogrammed courtship rhythm, known instinctively to all steeders, to allow them to get close enough to mount one. Of course, this only works on the females.

10. Steeders combine the attributes of several types of spiders. While being predominantly a giant version of the tarantula, they differ from that species in their leaping ability. Steeders can leap up to 240 feet in any direction from a standing start, once every three rounds, even while mounted. This, plus their ability to stick to any surface if even one of their eight feet is touching it, allows them to escape from nearly any deadly situation. Steeders move at half-speed when walking along walls or ceilings.

Duergar take advantage of these abilities by constructing elaborate saddles for their mounts which enable them to remain seated even while the steeder is bounding through the air or walking upside-down along a cavern ceiling. The saddles are equipped with numerous straps keeping the rider in place; once strapped in (a process which takes 2-4 minutes, depending upon the experience of the rider), it is virtually impossible to dislodge the duergar from his steeder. The saddles do have a "quick-release" system, allowing the duergar to dismount relatively quickly (in one round) if the need arises.

11. Like most spiders, a steeder can go for weeks or even months between meals. Due to the liquefied nature of their food, they can go for up to a year without water. Duergars feed captured slaves to their steeders every two weeks or so.

steeders are as dangerous to us as they are to our enemies.”

“I remember well,” replied Gundarr, thinking back to when he had been first thrown three years ago.

“These saddles are expensive and difficult to make. Only the larger steeders, those big enough to ride into battle, wear one. No need to waste time and resources on a smaller saddle when the creature won’t last long in battle. Plus, she’d soon grow out of it when she molted. Now give it here, slave.” The human complied quickly. Although a foot and a half shorter than the slave, Mordik held the heavy saddle without effort.

Gundarr knew that there would be no trouble saddling the steeder. She had spent the last four years in the company of the two duergar and their human slave and no longer considered them a threat.<sup>12</sup> Under Mordik’s instruction, Gundarr plopped the saddle upon her back, then crawled underneath to tighten all of the fastenings. “From this day forward, she’ll wear the saddle every hour of every day,” said Mordik. “It will be a second skin to her. It won’t be removed until she molts—and then she’ll be fitted with a saddle one size larger.”<sup>13</sup>

When it was in place, Gundarr approached and mounted easily. He no longer used the rhythmic pounding trick to approach the creature—she had long ago accepted him. They were a team now, rider and steed. Now that she was saddled, their training would continue, advancing to the next stage.

Mordik showed Gundarr how to strap himself in, and demonstrated the quick-release function. “Tomorrow, your real training begins,” he said with a smile.



Gundarr rode his steeder into the battle arena and faced Mordik, mounted on a much larger beast. Each had a metal prod in his hand,

with a leather cord wrapped around his wrist to prevent it from being dropped and lost.<sup>14</sup>

“What about weapons?” asked Gundarr, eager for battle training.

“Weapons come later,” replied Mordik. “We start with controlling the steeder’s movements. In battle, this must become fluid. You must direct your steeder without conscious thought. We’ll spend the next few months practicing control, so put away thoughts of weapons training until then. No, don’t give me that look.

“Now then, hold your prod in your off hand, freeing your weapon hand. We’ll begin with the basics. To move your steeder forward, use your prod here. To turn, a quick jab here, on the side. That’s right, like that . . .”



Gundarr led the half-dozen goblin slaves into the battle arena and locked the gate behind him. “Go to the far side of the cavern,” he commanded. “There you will find a chest. Open it.”

Warily, the goblins did as commanded. Once they were halfway across the cavern, he signaled to his steeder, and she approached him, allowing him to mount.<sup>15</sup> Gundarr secured himself into the saddle, feeding the leather straps through the metal rings attached to his drab plate mail armor specifically for that purpose.

“There are weapons inside the chest,” continued Gundarr. “Arm yourselves. I offer you your freedom today, slaves!”

The goblins looked up, astonished at what they were hearing.

“The key to the gate is on my belt,” said Gundarr. “To earn your freedom, you need only kill me and take the key from my lifeless body.” He smiled evilly.

Across the cavern, the blood rushed from the goblins’ faces. As the mounted duergar sped across the cavern floor, they hurriedly snatched up weapons and tried to organize a hasty defense.

It did little good. Control prod in his left hand, Gundarr sent his steeder straight into the center of the mass of goblins, sword cutting a bloody swath through them. Two swipes of his blade brought down as many goblin slaves. After passing through them, he prompted his mount to leap to the ceiling, in part to protect him from goblin retaliation, but mostly to practice the maneuver. The remaining goblins ran in different directions. It was pointless, though, for the locked gate was the only way out of the arena. From his vantage point looking down, Gundarr smiled a wicked smile. *Now this was training!* he thought.



Gundarr was ecstatic. The thrill of battle was upon him. He sent his steeder speeding along the cavern ceiling, above the pool of water. Gundarr knew a slip on his mount’s part would plunge them both into the water—which could easily mean his mount’s death<sup>16</sup>—but he had complete faith in her abilities. Three more kavalrachni followed him, mounted on their own steeders—his strike team. He had made it to a position of command within the elite spider-riders, and gloried in the prestige and honor it brought to his name. No longer was he Gundarr Crooknose: now he was Gundarr Kavalrach, Strike Team Leader!

They passed the underground pool, rounded a corner, and found their prey: a group of svirfneblin returning home from their patrol. One of the lead/members looked up at the last minute, perhaps catching a glimpse of movement, but it was far too late. Gundarr’s steeder was already in flight, landing on the lead svirfneblin and biting down with her fangs. The little svirfneblin tried to squirm free, but she had him in her first pair of legs, from which there was no easy escape.<sup>17</sup>

The other steeders in Gundarr’s strike team dropped down from the

12. Steeders in the wild are solitary creatures and do not form lasting relationships with other beings, not even their mating partners. (More times than not, the female will attempt to devour the male immediately after mating.) The female will guard her egg sac until the newborns hatch, but from that point on, they’re on their own. A rider/mount “partnership” must develop slowly over the course of many years.

13. This, of course, is the simplest way to determine if an encountered steeder is wild or domesticated—domesticated ones will always be

saddled if they are large enough for battle training. The exceptions to this rule are the males, but they are usually kept confined to prevent their escape and/or death at the hands of one of the Underdark’s many dangers.

14. In a pinch, these control prods can be used as a weapon, causing damage as a club. All duergar spider-riders are considered proficient in their use—this is, in effect, a bonus weapon proficiency.

15. Steeders are intelligent creatures, and those that go through the years of training that kaval-

rachni and their mounts do can be taught to recognize several hand signals. These usually consist of the following commands: come here, remain where you are, attack that enemy, fetch that object.

16. Steeders breathe through holes in the sides of their abdomens, so they will never willingly enter water, as it is much easier for a steeder to drown than a humanoid—it doesn’t do a spider any good to hold its head above water, and it is unable to close off its air-intake holes. A steeder immersed in water drowns in 1d3 rounds.



cavern ceiling and attacked as well. The disorganized svirfneblin had little time to react before being overpowered. Some broke ranks and tried to flee, but ran straight into Mordik and his own band of kavalrachni, who had approached the svirfneblin party from the other direction. With nowhere to turn, they did their best to make a stand, but between the steeders' wicked fangs and the duergars' equally wicked blades, they didn't last long.

The blood of the Deep Gnomes splattered on his battle armor, Gundarr gave a throaty roar and voiced his pleasure. "Useless gnomes!" he cried. "Worthy only as food for our mounts! Let's see if the pitiful weaklings had anything of value." He dismounted and began looting the nearest corpse, looking for the gems he knew the Deep Gnomes often carried. The other duergar followed suit. Gundarr's steeder, meanwhile, chose a svirfneblin corpse and began to feed.

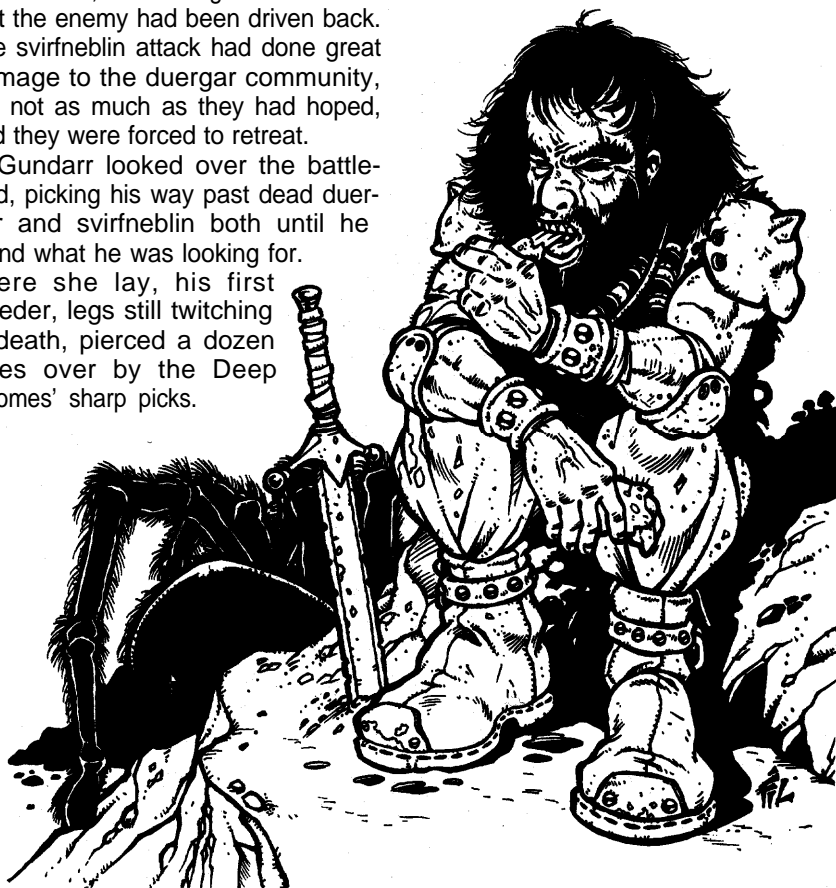


*This wasn't supposed to happen!* thought Gundarr as his sword swung left and right, cutting a swath among his enemies. For years, his band of duergar kavalrachni had preyed upon the nearby races of the Underdark with virtual impunity. None could stand against the steeders and their duergar masters. Until now, that was.

None of the duergar had expected an attack from a bunch of svirfneblin, especially since they had been historically more interested in mining than in combat. The attack and sheer numbers of the invading svirfneblin force had taken the duergar community by surprise, and the earth elementals summoned to aid the Deep Gnomes certainly didn't help the duergars any.

Mordik had led the kavalrachni to their mounts at the first sounds of battle, and they flanked the enemy. The strategy worked well, for the steeders were able to maneuver on the ceilings out of the range of the svirfneblin warriors' weapons and position themselves to best advantage before striking. Gundarr's steeder had killed six of the deep gnomes before the sheer number of them swarmed over her; he had been forced to jettison himself from the steeder's saddle and fight his way back to safety. His sword was slick with the blood of his enemies, and his muscles ached from the hours of endless combat, but at long last it seemed that the enemy had been driven back. The svirfneblin attack had done great damage to the duergar community, but not as much as they had hoped, and they were forced to retreat.

Gundarr looked over the battlefield, picking his way past dead duergar and svirfneblin both until he found what he was looking for. There she lay, his first steeder, legs still twitching in death, pierced a dozen times over by the Deep Gnomes' sharp picks.



"You served me well in life," Gundarr said to his faithful steeder. "Now, in death, you shall serve me one last time."

She was delicious.<sup>18</sup>



*Johnathan M. Richards admits that he isn't really that big a fan of spiders, although he does have nearly twenty years' worth of Spider-Man comic book lovingly stashed away in his library closet.*

17. A steeder's first attack in combat is with its front legs; if successful (requiring an attack against AC 10, adjusted for magic and Dexterity only), the sticky pads on the steeder's feet prevent the prey from escaping. A victim can escape by making a Dexterity or Strength check at -10. One attempt can be made each round, but the steeder receives an automatic bite attack for 1-8 hp damage each round the victim is held. While held, the victim is at -2 to attack and damage rolls.

Due to special hairs on the steeder's pedipalps and feet, the creature is able to taste what it touches. Once a steeder has tasted something good in its forelegs, it usually won't let go until it has killed its victim.

18. A few final words about the steeder: the creature is listed in both the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ book (under "Spider," on pages 326-327) and in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Volume Two* (under "Dwarf, Duergar"). A quick perusal of these works

will show a number of differences in the steeder's statistics. No doubt this is a result of trying to generalize the listings for the giant water spider, flying spider, giant trap door spider, and steeder into one listing in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* book. While this saves space and allows a greater variety of monsters to be included in its pages, it doesn't accurately reflect the steeder's statistics as shown in the earlier work. For those interested in the comparison, here are the differences between the steeder's statistics:

	MC2	MM
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	Nil	C
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	2-20	1-8
MOVEMENT:	12	3, Web 12
HIT DICE:	4	4+4
THACO:	17	15
SIZE:	M (4' high, 8' long)	L (8'-12' diameter)

MORALE:	11	13
XP VALUE:	120	975

The steeder works well no matter which set of statistics are used, although "purists" should note that the ones from *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Volume 2* are probably more "accurate." The Intelligence rating of "Low (5-7)" should be used, however, as steeders are intelligent enough to serve as riding mounts, a fact agreed upon in both works. Also, if using the statistics from the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* book, disregard the movement rate. Steeders cannot move in webs and have a movement rate of 12; this is mentioned in the description of steeders on page 327.

Body parts from steeders can be used in the creation of *slippers of spider climbing* and *boots of striding and springing*. They are not used in creating *cloaks of arachnidia* because of the steeder's lack of a dangerous venom and its inability to travel over or to produce webs.





# Best Behavior

## The Secrets of Dwarven Etiquette

by Christopher Perkins

illustrated by Terry Dykstra

**THOSE WHO KNOW DWARVES** speak of their gruff yet friendly demeanors, their mining expertise, and their penchant for working things out of stone and metal. However, dwarven culture is rich with protocol, and the slightest misstep in etiquette can often lead to embarrassment, harassment, and sometimes discord. Simply put, there are certain behaviors and rituals one must follow in dwarven society lest one be ridiculed or shunned.

Observing and following dwarven customs and protocols requires the dwarven etiquette non-weapon proficiency (see sidebar). Anyone possessing dwarven etiquette is well-versed in dwarven cultural observances and protocols. Non-dwarves who have spent little or no time among societies of dwarves but have the dwarven etiquette NWP suffer a -2 penalty to dwarven etiquette proficiency checks.

### The Eleven Dwarven Axioms of Etiquette

Dwarves who are raised in dwarven communities are raised to embrace the eleven Dwarven Axioms. Variations of these exist in every dwarven kingdom from Hammerhold to Aundaraun, usually chiselled into the great pillars that support the vaulted ceilings of the magnificent dwarven halls. Children are made to recite these axioms by their fathers, and those who fail to pick up on them are labeled dunces and forced to learn them by carefully chiselling each axiom into a rectangular slate tile. The tiles are then mounted to the walls of the dwarfing's cave as firm reminders.

- 1 "Be loyal and honorable to your king."
- 2 "Honor your clan, your family, and your ancestors."
- 3 "Stand by your word."
- 4 "Never forget when you've been wronged."
- 5 "Never turn your back on a friend in need."
- 6 "Anger and pride are both good for the spirit."
- 7 "In the hearth, the woman is always right."
- 8 "Never come between a dwarf and his weapon."
- 9 "Never make light of another dwarf's beard."
- 10 "Never make light of another dwarf's livelihood."
- 11 "Honor those who have honored themselves."

The Eighth Axiom of Etiquette, "Never come between a dwarf and his weapon," inevitably spawned what some dwarves refer to as the Unsung Twelfth Axiom: "Never come between a dwarf and his ale." Some dwarven kings insist on adding new Axioms to the Eleven handed down through generations, but these faux Axioms are often forgotten and seldom universal.

### Greetings & Salutations

*The shabby dwarf strode up to the iron gates of Corundin, a dwarven outpost in the Rankar Mountains. There he stood before the armored dwarven gateminder and barked, "I am Anar, son of Tarmok, loyal servant of King Strohm. I return with news of the cursed derro and their march toward Glimmershale. Stand aside, and let me enter."*

*The dwarven sentinel nodded once and placed a gloved hand on Anar's right shoulder. "Hail, Anar. Corundin welcomes you. My sister will be happy when she hears you have returned."*

Dwarven salutations generally vary, but etiquette dictates that greetings should be polite, succinct, and respectful. Strangers are afforded similar treatment unless they are outwardly hostile or undeserving. Friendly salutations border on boisterous, with dwarves patting each other on the back and speaking highly of one another's families. It is poor judgment for one dwarf to react angrily to another dwarf for no reason, and such anger is contagious and almost certainly reciprocated. Greeting a dwarf by insulting his good name or his family invites curses and two-fisted violence, as most dwarves will not allow his honor to be sullied or his clan defamed. Even feigned insults are frowned upon, as dwarves find no humor in mockery.

Dwarves do not shake hands as humans do. When greeting or bidding farewell to a dwarf, an individual places his or her right hand on the dwarf's right shoulder. For particularly emotional greetings or departures, this is done while simultaneously using one's left hand to grasp the dwarf's right forearm. This is called the binding.

Dwarves consider the shaking of hands a "human gesture" but take no great offense.

Placing one's hand on a dwarf's left



## The Etiquette Proficiency

The general etiquette proficiency (see the *Player's Handbook*, page 80) is based on a character's Charisma score and covers basic understanding of the proper forms of behavior and address, particularly involving nobility and persons of rank.

Unless otherwise noted, a character with the general etiquette proficiency knows the proper forms of behavior and address for his own race only. Thus, an elf with the etiquette (elf) proficiency would know the rules of etiquette governing elven society. Knowing the rules of dwarven or human etiquette requires the elf to invest a second proficiency slot.

Depending on the campaign, the DM could require separate etiquette

proficiencies for racial sub-species. For example, a character could have the etiquette (wood elf) and etiquette (high elf) proficiencies. This division is based on the likelihood that wood elven culture is distinct from high elven culture, each with its own set of protocols. Likewise, a mountain dwarf with the etiquette (mountain dwarf) proficiency would not necessarily know the correct code of conduct in hill dwarf society. However, because the two "distinct" societies are arguably similar (dwarves are dwarves, after all), the DM may allow a character with the etiquette (mountain dwarf) proficiency to grasp the fundamental rules of hill dwarf society by imposing a -2 penalty to his hill dwarf etiquette rolls.

shoulder is done only when one wishes to convey grim or ill tidings.

Dwarves who desire no formal or close acquaintance typically nod once as a succinct sign of acknowledgement that doubles as a gesture of respect. A dwarf who wishes to ignore another merely turns his head 90 degrees to the right. At worst, this is considered an affront. Turning one's head 90 degrees to the left is an insult and tells the recipient that he is unworthy even to stand in the presence of the gesturing individual. This is often a precursor to violence.

Dwarves do not wave. The halfling tendency to wave at everything and everyone makes dwarves roll their eyes and clutch their warhammers.

Lastly, pulling a dwarf's beard (even playfully) during formal and informal greetings and farewell bidings is guaranteed to incur lifelong animosity. A dwarf's beard is not to be tugged. Complimenting another's beard, however, is sure to leave an endearing impression.

## Dwarven Greetings—Reaction Modifiers:

-3 for complimenting a dwarf's beard

-2 for speaking well of the dwarf's family or clan

-1 for kindly addressing the dwarf by name and/or clan

+1 for turning one's head 90 degrees to the right

+2 for any insult or mockery toward the dwarf

+3 for turning one's head 90 degrees to the left

+4 for defaming a dwarf's family or clan

+5 for making light of (or tugging on) a dwarf's beard

## Clan Status

*Gronmir both loathed and admired the child's tenacity. The clumsy rockling followed him from one end of town to the other, begging to know the truth about the Battle of Unther's Rift. The fact that Gronmir himself had not fought in that battle was not lost to the lad, but Gronmir carried the shield of his brother who died at the Rift, and with it carried fame.*

*Born proudly on the shield was the crystal tear symbol of the Shimmerdelfe clan. Other dwarves nodded once as Gronmir walked by, the beardless splinter of a dwarf nipping at his heels.*

Dwarves are proud by nature, but no proud dwarf was ever born to a disgraced clan. Family honor is the most important thing to any dwarf, and one would sooner die than watch his or her clan sink into disrepute. Dwarves are protective of their immediate family and relatives regardless of the distance separating them. For that reason alone, kingdoms of dwarves never fail to unite against common enemies, because the clans tend to be spread throughout these kingdoms, and one clan always stands together.

A dwarf who defies his family defies his clan. Defying one's clan

makes the dwarf an outcast, and exile is the worst punishment most dwarves can imagine (worse than imprisonment or death).

The "standard protocol" is for young dwarves, male and female, to defer to their closest elders. Younger brothers obey older brothers, while the eldest brother obeys his father and uncle. This structure of obedience works equally for the women, who defer to their sisters, aunts, and mothers. The individual clan structure is typically patriarchal, with a grandfather-like figure making decisions for the good of the entire clan and his sons or nephews keeping their respective families in line. Before an enterprising dwarf strikes out on his own, he is required to win the favor and blessing of the Clan Father dwarf. To leave without pledging one's unwavering faith to his clan in the presence of the Clan Father is poorly regarded, and defying the wishes of the Clan Father is punishable by exile.

Dwarves are lawful good and loyal to their clans. Clans earn honor through heroic deeds, loyal service to the king, and great achievements. Whether this entails building a great bridge across a chasm or slaying a deep dragon, the honor bestowed by such accomplishments bolsters clan pride in the eyes of the community. Dwarves are expected to acknowledge the achievements of other clans, and a clan with a particularly distinguished lineage is placed atop a pedestal and becomes the model that other clans strive to emulate. Recalling tales of clan honor requires a successful local history NWP check.

It is considered fine etiquette to compliment a dwarf by recounting some tale of how his clan achieved "greater glory," perhaps by telling a gloriously-spun tale of how the clan purged the caverns of drow during the Great Rockfall 200 years ago. Since it is impossible to retain all of one clan's accomplishments, dwarves generally regard members of other clans with utmost respect. In this way, dwarven clans may share in each other's honor, and the community remains in high spirits. A clan that graced with a long line of heroes will often sing the praises of a clan whose accomplishments are more modest and, in so doing, reaffirm its own sense of pride, honor, and integrity.

When a dwarf dishonors his clan,



he is placed under close observation and coerced into redeeming himself in some fashion. If the dwarf continues to disgrace himself and his family, he is cast out before the honor of the entire clan is sullied by his misdeeds. In extreme situations, all recognition of this dwarf is erased from community lore, to the point where no dwarf will speak of the individual or recount instances of his dishonor. The Clan Father may even instruct his daughters to strike the name from the stone tablets that chronicle his family's lineage.

### Dwarven Clanspeak— Reaction Modifiers:

- 4 for recalling some great accomplishment of the clan
- 2 for speaking highly of one honorable clan member
- +2 for mentioning the name of an exiled clan member
- +4 for questioning or challenging a clan's honor

## Gender Roles

*Lir and her husband were elderly, having lived in the kingdom of Vundarak for nearly four centuries. Across the chiseled marble table in their home sat a guest, Chalystra of Clan Rockdust, who sought to procure one of Pomar's finely-crafted warhammers for her son's twenty-fifth birthday.*

*"I want to buy a hammer for Tharkax, my son. I know that such a weapon would make him both happy and proud. I have some uncut amethysts. May I discuss a fair price with your husband?"*

*"Yes," replied Lir as her husband fussed impatiently. "You may. But do not tire Pomar with your haggling. Offer a fair price, and my husband may oblige you."*

Most dwarven realms and communities are governed by a single ruler who is almost always male. (Dwarven queens are rare. A queen rules only so long as it takes for one of the dead king's heirs to reach the age of 100 years, at which time he is deemed old and wise enough to take his mother's seat on the throne.) Dwarves of both genders support this patriarchy and honor their liege with loyal, humble service. However, males do not "rule the roost," so to speak. In fact, within individual homes, the females usually hold sway.

Dwarven males are typically haughty and proud, and it is the duty

## Using Reaction Modifiers

A character who understands the correct protocol for introducing oneself to a dwarf (or any other creature) can diffuse an otherwise hostile encounter. Normally, NPC reactions are determined by the DM based on the actions of the player characters. (If a character walks up and yanks a dwarf's beard, the befuddled dwarf is likely to cleave the character in two with his axe.)

However, there are instances when the DM doesn't know how an NPC should respond, in which case he may wish to roll 2d10 and consult **Table 59: Encounter Reactions** in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide (DMG)* page 140. In the case of dwarven culture, there are several modifiers that can be applied to this roll. Positive modifiers (+1, +2) count as penalties, worsening the NPCs' reactions, while negative modifiers (-2, -1) actually work in the PCs' favor. A modified

roll of 19+ always indicates a hostile reaction.

Reaction rolls are never made for player characters; players roleplay their characters' reactions as befits the situation. When used to govern the reactions of NPCs, the random roll allows for some unexpected results. For instance, if a character playfully yanks on a dwarven NPC's beard, a reaction check is rolled with a +5 penalty (see **Dwarven Greetings—Reaction Modifiers** in this article). If the character is acting in a "Friendly" manner, the DM rolls 2d10 and consults the first column of **Table 59** in the *DMG*. If the DM rolls a 3 and applies the +5 reaction penalty for such a heinous breach of etiquette, the dwarf's reaction is still "indifferent." Instead of drawing his axe in a predictably irritated manner, the dwarf instead raises an eyebrow and casually remarks, "Haven't you got something better to do?"

of the women to humble them. They laud their husbands, sons and brothers for their strength, dedication and pride; they also chastise them severely for laziness, boorishness and (sometimes) infidelity. In the hearth, the women command the men, and dwarven etiquette dictates that no male dwarf may rightfully belittle or oppose the "women of the hearth." Dwarven men are expected to be kind and faithful to their wives, sisters and daughters, no matter how abrasive and shrewish their demeanors. A male dwarf harming a female dwarf is almost unheard of, for the hearth (the home) is where the men learn humility. This is ingrained early in a dwarven male's childhood; even the most churlish males bend before the iron will of their female counterparts (which explains why so many men spend long hours working in the mines).

There is no inequality among dwarven females. (This is not true of the males, who sometimes prize their stature above one another.) The women are usually "hearthkeepers," devoted to their families in every conceivable regard, and they share many of the same responsibilities. In dwarven culture, a female of any clan can speak freely to any other female dwarf within the community, including female members of the ruling

nobility (such as the queen, if there is one). However, an invisible hierarchy does not permit women to address members of the male nobility or males of high standing without first seeking permission from their wives or daughters. Breach of this protocol is considered a disgrace not only to the offending female, but to her immediate family as well. It is common practice, regardless of social standing, for a dwarven woman to petition other dwarven women for the "privilege" of speaking to their respective mates.

Male dwarves of any status may speak freely to anyone within their own community, male or female, including members of the nobility or royal family.

Within the male patriarchy, women have no voting rights in matters that affect the community at large. (A dwarven queen would be an exception.) The king and his male subjects are the ones responsible for the community's protection and continuance. (Certainly female dwarves contribute in more subtle ways.) The perception is always maintained that the men are "in control" and the women support them, even when the truth is otherwise.

### Dwarven Gender Conduct— Reaction Modifiers:

- 4 for behaving kindly to a female dwarf in her own hearth

- 2 for behaving kindly to a female dwarf within the community
- +2 for offending a female dwarf within the community
- +4 for offending a female dwarf in her own hearth

## Civility and Lack Thereof

*Horgaht appraised each facet of the gem through his crystal eyepiece. Diardun waited impatiently, tapping his iron boot on the cavern floor and sighing every once in a while to remind the elder dwarf of his impatience.*

*"Your workmanship is improving, Diardun," Horgaht spoke smugly. "Nary a scratch on this one. Granted, it's not the finest emerald I've ever seen."*

*Diardun's face flushed as he snatched the gem out of Horgaht's hand.*

*"You wouldn't know a emerald from a lump of coal!" Diardun spewed. "Well might a piercer strike some sense into you!"*

*Horgaht smiled broadly as the ill-tempered gem cutter stamped off.*

Some dwarves have gained enough wisdom in their years to appreciate civility. They cast off impertinence like a wet blanket and have neither the time nor energy to harbor resentment to others of their kind (and other civilized demihumans of their acquaintance). However, many dwarves actually prefer to hold grudges. Gripes and grudges are customary in dwarven society, and a dwarf without at least one gripe or grudge is worthy of suspicion. Disdain is embedded deep in dwarven culture, and jaded dwarves are accorded a fair measure of respect. Grumbling, grinding one's teeth, and snarling are sure-fire ways to win another dwarf's admiration or, at the very least, respect. Many dwarves are perceived as "gruff" by outsiders because their anger is contagious. Scowling at unfamiliar passers-by is as common and well-regarded as a broad smile greeting a familiar face. It should not be mistaken for aloofness or actual disdain.

Dwarves who are perpetually dour are respected, but those who fail to enjoy themselves or take light of their periodic stoicism are inapproachable and friendless. Thus, dwarves try very hard to cast aside their inbred anger in the company of friends and family, reverting to their gruff demeanors when confronted by strangers and distant acquaintances. Dwarven transactions and merchant relations can

border on hostility, but it is considered poor etiquette for a dwarf to leave any meeting genuinely upset. Even two dwarves who refuse to see "eye to eye" can part on equal terms and look forward to their next meeting.

Dwarven males are blunt and forthright fellows; the females are equally forthright but often more subtle with their words. Dwarves who are evasive and conniving rarely fit well in dwarven society and usually strike out on their own. To the elves, humans and halflings, dwarves lack any modicum of social grace. However, dwarves measure their social interaction very differently from these other races. Politeness is always tempered with severity and directness. A dwarf doesn't waste words finagling over the price of a battle axe; if the price is unreasonable, he'll bid the vendor a stern farewell and look somewhere else. Hagglng with the dwarf is tolerated only if the dwarf doesn't feel like he's being played for a fool.

## Dwarven Civility— Reaction Modifiers:

- 4 when confronting a dwarf in a grim but polite manner
- 2 when confronting a dwarf in a stoic but non-threatening manner
- +2 when confronting a dwarf rudely or belligerently
- +4 when confronting a dwarf in a gleeful, prankish and chipper manner

## Table Manners

*Kiska was barely 30 years old, but she had the spirit of a cantankerous 300 year-old delve-mother. She sat at the table, too close to the embrous hearth for her taste, and stared appallingly at what her sister Dara had prepared.*

*The stuffed mushrooms heaped upon her plate looked like shriveled derro heads with yellow slime trailing out of their withered grey necks, and she said so, loudly, to the astonishment of her brother Tarmeel.*

*Instantly, Kiska felt a sudden jolt against the back of her head as Dara slapped her. "Would you rather scrub the soot off the walls?" inquired her sister.*

*Kiska saw that her father was staring at her disapprovingly, so she curled her nose, drew in her sour face, stabbed one of the derro heads with her fork, and reluctantly gulped it down.*

Most dwarves eat around the fires of their hearths. To stand morosely in

a corner and pick at one's food is unbecoming. To take one's meal away from the table into another chamber is unforgivable (and never tolerated by the family matron). "Table talk" revolves around storytelling, and every dwarf seated at the table is afforded a chance to speak regardless of age. A dwarf who refuses to talk during the meal is regarded as an ingrate. Even a dwarf who is not hungry can still sit at the table and share stories with his family and friends; there is simply no excuse for anti-social behavior at the dinner table.

It is impolite to make light of one's food or to question the talents of those who have prepared the meal. (Complaining about rations is acceptable, but slighting a specially prepared meal is poor etiquette.) The gods smile upon those who stuff their bellies and frown upon dwarves who cannot see the value of a cooked meal. Dwarven custom entails clashing one's fork and knife together three times after finishing a meal—a thank you to the chef for a job well done.

## Dwarven Table Manners— Reaction Modifiers:

- 4 for recounting an interesting tale around the dinner table
- 2 for clashing one's utensils three times after a good meal
- +2 for complaining about a prepared meal
- +4 for refusing to tell stories during a meal at the dinner table

## Dwarven Faux-Pas

Dwarven faux-pas are rarely unforgivable, but they do cast a dim light on the unwary perpetrator and often affect how other dwarves deal with them in the future. Below is a list of some of the worst faux-pas; the DM should apply reaction penalties (+1 to +5) depending on the severity of the "infraction."

❖ Mucking up a dwarven legend or heroic tale. Forgetting the name of a dwarven hero is bad enough; mistaking one dwarven hero for another is just wrong. To begin recounting a tale and then not finish it is extremely rude.

❖ Calling a dwarf "What's-His-Name" or forgetting his name altogether. A dwarf's pride stems from his name and that of his clan. To forget a dwarf's name is to forsake his friendship.

❖ Failing to braid one's beard before attending royalty, community





# Artifact Design Contest

## Design an ARCANÉ AGE™ artifact or relic for the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Setting

Long ago in the Realms, wizards and priests really knew how to craft a piece of hardware. No namby-pamby vortal swords, no wimpy staves of the magi, no boring rings of multiple wishes. They just don't make magical items like they used to! The spellcasters of the ARCANÉ AGE made artifacts and relics that rocked the world.

Design an artifact or relic from the long-lost history of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting, according to the guidelines set forth in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, and let the world tremble before your magical genius! Realms guru Steven E. Schend, Julia Martin, and Dale Donovan will judge your entries, and the winner will receive the ARCANÉ AGE trilogy of novels, autographed by the author Clayton Emery, plus one copy each of the ARCANÉ AGE *Cormanthyr: Empire of Elves* accessory and *The Fall of Myth Drannor* adventure module, both autographed by designer Steven E. Schend. Three runners up will receive unsigned copies.



Please limit entries to 1,000 words or less.

### "Relics of an Arcane Age" Contest Rules

**1. Entry:** To enter, send your completed entry form including your name, address, phone number, the spell to which your submission applies, and your proposed spell ("Entry") to TSR, Inc. ("TSR") Dragon Magazine Relics of an Arcane Age Contest, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. No purchase required. You may submit as many entries as you wish, but only one entry per submission. There is no advantage to submitting the same entry more than once. Artifact entries may not exceed 1,000 words in length. If you are under 18, you must have your parent's permission to enter. Entries must be received before midnight (Pacific Time), May 15, 1998. Winners will be selected by a team of TSR judges based on the entry's consistency with the feel of the AD&D game and the Forgotten Realms® campaign setting, originality, appropriateness to the game, and applicability to the game system. All decisions are final. The probability of winning is based exclusively on the quality of the entries received.

**2. Originality of Entry:** All entries must be in English. Entrant warrants that the entry written above is the original and exclusive work of Entrant, and that Entrant has not assigned, transferred, licensed, or sold the right to use the Entry to any other party. Entrant agrees to indemnify TSR against good faith claims of copyright infringement based on TSR's use of the Entry, but such indemnification shall not apply if it can be shown that Entrant had no access to the allegedly infringed work.

**3. Use and Ownership of Entry Info:** In consideration for TSR's review of Entrant's application and, if applicable, prizes awarded hereunder, Entrant transfers all rights, including all copyright ownership rights in entry to TSR and acknowledges that the entry is hereby the sole property of TSR. It is further understood that Entrant hereby transfers any and all interest or rights that she/he acquires in entry, including but not limited to trademark rights and copyrights and protection under 17 U.S.C. § 106 to TSR. TSR shall have no obligation for consideration other than as defined herein.

**4. Prizes:** The Best AD&D Forgotten Realms artifact or relic shall each receive a copy of each novel in the Arcane Age novel trilogy, signed by author Clayton Emery (approximate value \$17.95), a copy of *Cormanthyr: Empire of Elves*, signed by designer Steven E. Schend (approximate value \$24.95), and *The Fall of Myth Drannor* adventure, signed by designer Steven Schend (approximate value \$13.95). Three runners-up will receive unsigned copies of the above mentioned products.

### "Relics of an Arcane Age" Contest

Name : \_\_\_\_\_  
Address : \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Eligibility:** Void where prohibited by law. In order to receive any prize, Entrant agrees to sign TSR's affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance ("Affidavit") within 5 days of receipt of notification or forfeit prize. If the winner is a minor, then the guardian must co-sign the Affidavit. By acceptance of prize, Entrant agrees to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. TSR assumes no responsibility for, late, ineligible, incomplete, or misdirected entries. Non-compliance with the time parameters contained herein or return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Employees of TSR, Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and their respective affiliates and distributors are not eligible.

**6. Restrictions:** Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All prize winners shall be notified by phone or letter. No substitutions of prizes are allowed, except at the option of TSR, should the featured prize(s) become unavailable. All federal, state, provincial, and local regulations apply. The winner is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state, provincial, and local taxes. For a list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Dragon Magazine Relics of an Arcane Age Contest Winners, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057. Requests for winners lists must be received by April 30, 1998. Allow 4 weeks for delivery of winners list.

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**Table 1: Dwarven Insult Generator**

The insult is a common element of dwarven culture. Insults spoken between friends of equal standing are commonplace and actually encouraged. Insulting a dwarf of higher station is unwise unless the recipient has a "stone hide" (referring to his or her ability to deflect all manner of disparagement). Insulting a dwarf of lower station is simply rude and unnecessary.

Dwarves insult each other in contests of one-upmanship and on social occasions. Building insults that are accepted within the protocols of dwarven etiquette isn't difficult, provided one directs the insults solely at the dwarf in question. Making fun of a dwarf's family or clan is not funny—at least, not to the dwarves. Also, certain terms are so insulting that they almost invariably result in a physical attack. (Fighting words are marked with an asterisk.)

Before one can hurl insults, one must know how to build them. Below is a sample table of piecemeal dwarven insults. Simply choose one word from each column (A, B, C) and string them together. One may choose freely from the lists of descriptive adjectives and nouns to form an apt descriptor of the individual, or one can simply roll randomly and hope for the best!

Roll 1d100	Column A	Column B	Column C
01-04	incompetent	anvil-dropping	armpit
05-08	unweened	bunyon-brained	breadcrumb
09-12	bulbous	willow-waisted	natterling
13-16	cantankerous	cave-slinking	gasbladder
17-20	drooling	donkey-eared	carbuncle
21-24	beardless*	fish-catching	pixie*
25-28	fungular	toe-biting	gargoyle
29-32	gibbering	nib-chewing	fuzzpot
33-36	repugnant	rust-minded	thumb-basher
37-40	babbling	moss-bearded*	gas spore
41-44	reeking	porridge-faced	pestie
45-48	friendless*	hearth-hating*	pebble*
49-52	pompous	axe-breaking*	shard
53-56	dangling	nose-picking	osquip
57-60	slothful	gnat-ridden	rockrunt
61-64	unhoned	tree-climbing*	stench kow
65-68	tentacled	sliver-witted	ledge lizard
69-72	warty	pech-skulled	smudge-rubber
73-76	dainty*	lantern-lugging	snake's egg
77-80	witless	elf-kissing*	tunnel worm
81-84	craftless	chasm-hearted	rust monster
85-88	rickety	crystal-breaking	goblin-spawn*
89-92	gemless	slate-carving	mole
93-96	barbed	milk-drinking	stalactite
97-00	moldy	tool-snatching*	mushroom

events, dwarven weddings, or religious ceremonies. Some dwarves braid their beards on a daily basis as a matter of pride, and also to circumvent any possible breach of etiquette. An unkempt, unbraided beard is fine for everyday life, but braiding is symbolic of celebration and is expected in large public gatherings.

❖ Letting one who slanders your clan go unpunished. Whether the retribution consists of verbal beratement or physical assault, a dwarf must retaliate against any remark or action that slanders his or her family's honor.

❖ Borrowing another dwarf's beard comb. This just isn't done.

❖ Sipping from another dwarf's tankard. Dwarves do not share drinks (although they've been known to buy rounds for others). Drinking from another dwarf's mug is a great way to start a fight.

❖ Shouting at the king. Unlike elven and human nobles, dwarven kings are known for their accessibility to the common folk. One of the great dwarven legends describes the time Yagard Stonesplitter screamed in King Galvan's ear for three days straight, condemning the monarch for refusing to strike hard into duergar territory. The king was so impressed with the dwarf's tirade that he appointed the weaponsmith Chief

Military Advisor. Of course, the tale is untrue. Nevertheless brazen dwarves seeking advancement have often stood before their kings in times of strife and berated them only to be thrown out of the royal hall. (There are exceptions to this rule. In the kingdom of Granitemantle, the dwarves have an annual "Shout at the King" contest in which the dwarves with the loudest voices stand before the sealed doors of the palace and scream their lungs out. If the king can hear them through the 10' thick stone doors, he honors these loud fellows with a meal in the palace that evening.)

❖ Spending or collecting coins of non-dwarven mint. Dwarves who are accustomed to traveling on the surface have overcome their loathing for non-dwarven currency, but they usually keep one dwarven coin with them at all times for luck.

❖ Lying about one's name and refusing to divulge the name of one's clan. Dwarven thieves are known to wield disguises instead of warhammers, and they are often shunned for their duplicity. A dwarf who cannot stand and speak his name or declare his clan cannot be trusted.

❖ Cursing any of the dwarven gods. Dwarves have a deep spirituality, and they are cautious and wise enough not to anger their gods for fear of incurring an immortal's anger and enmity. On the other hand, it is perfectly well for a dwarf to invoke a god's name to curse someone else as in "By Moradin's beard, you're a foul wretch!"

❖ Failing to acknowledge another dwarf's deeds or prowess. Whether he is a bridge builder or mindstalker, a dwarf likes to hear his name and deeds spoken of with respect. When a dwarf introduces himself by name and clan, the worst affront would be to reply, "And what do you do?" Even if the individual being addressed knows nothing of the dwarf or his deeds, the best reply would be, "You carry a proud name. Please tell me of your great deeds." Dwarves who travel beyond their kingdoms carry word of their own deeds with them and are eager to gain a reputation.



*Christopher Perkins is a dainty, anvil-dropping pestie who prefers weak iced tea to strong dwarven ale.*





**MAGE**  
OF SORCERERS CRUSADE

And Let Slip The Dogs Of War.  
The clash of Magic, Faith and Science begins in May of 1498.  
Featuring fiction by Storm Constantine and illustrations by the Hildebrandt Brothers.

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# Conventions

## MARCH CONVENTIONS

### MegaCon '98

**March 13-15** **FL**

Expo Center, Orlando FL. Guests: Julie Bell, John Byrne, Tony Daniel, Joseph M. Linsner, George Perez, Don Rosa, William Tucci, Boris Vallejo, Mark Waid, and Steve Bryant. Events: role-playing, RPGA® Network, miniatures gaming, comic book artists, CCGs, anime, LARP, comics, and gaming dealers room. Other activities: board gaming, fantasy art show and auction. Contact: P.O. Box 3120, Winter Park, FL 32790. Email: megacon98@aol.com. Website: <http://www.edgglobal.com/megacon>.

### Westward-Ho III

**March 14** **TX**

Best Western Hotel, Midland TX. Events: historical, fantasy, science-fiction, miniatures, *Magic: the Gathering*\*, open gaming dealers area. For more information write to: Westward-Ho III, P.O. Box 9805, Midland, TX 79708.

### Gamer's Con IV

**March 20-22** **NJ**

Four Points Inn, Route 70 East, Cherry Hill, NJ. Events: RPGA Network events, including first-run LIVING CITY™

and LIVING DEATH™ tournaments, and a LIVING DEATH interactive event. Artist Guest of Honor: Jason Alexander Behnke (*L5R/Tempest*). Other activities: All new "Lords of Gaming" contests, vendors, artists, auction, demonstrations, computer gaming and more. Registration: \$30 pre-reg; \$40 at door for weekend. All events free. Contact: Heleen Durston, c/o Multigenre, Inc., 2432 Steiner Rd., Lakehurst, NJ 08733-3437. Email: [info@multigenre.com](mailto:info@multigenre.com) or [acd@lucent.com](mailto:acd@lucent.com). Website: <http://www.multigenre.com>.

### Midsouthcon 17

**March 20-22** **TN**

Grand Veranda Hotel, Memphis TN. Events: gaming, panels, dealer's room, video room, masquerade, art show, auction, filking, and more. Registration: \$30 at the door. Contact: Midsouth Science and Fiction Conventions, Inc. P.O. Box 11446, Memphis, TN 38111.

### AggieCon XXIX

**March 26-29** **TX**

Texas A&M University. Guests: Robert Asprin, Kerry O'Quinn, Joe R. Lansdale, Thomas Knowles, Darlene Bolesney. Events: dealer's room, art show, panels, gaming, charity auction, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, masquerade

ball, costume contest, 24-hour anime room. Contact: Texas A&M University, MSC Student Programs Box J-1, College Station, TX 77844. Email: [aggiecon@msc.tamu.edu](mailto:aggiecon@msc.tamu.edu). Website: <http://cepeheid.tamu.edu/aggiecon>.

### The Delve of Destiny II

**March 26-29** **Online**

Events: IRC-based AD&D® tournaments, web-based games, reviews, interviews, special chats, special guests, giveaways, contests, and a whole slew of websites and information for you to peruse. Registration: free. Contact: <http://members.tripod.com/DoDIII/>.

### Egyptian Campaign '98

**March 27-29** **IL**

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. Events: RPGA Network events, AD&D game, *Shadowrun*\*, *Battletech*\*, *Warhammer 40K*\*, *Empire Builder*\*, *Diplomacy*\*, *Axis & Allies*\*, *Magic*, *Star Fleet Battles*\*, *Car Wars*\*, and many other board, miniature, card, and role-playing games. Contact: Egyptian Campaign 1990, c/o S.I.U.C. Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, Third Floor Student Center, Carbondale, IL 62901-4425. Email: [ECGamCon@aol.com](mailto:ECGamCon@aol.com). Website: <http://www.siu.edu/~gamesoc>.

### Con-spiracy 8

**March 28-29** **IL**

Grace Roper Lounge at Rockford College, Rockford, IL. Events: roleplaying, card, board, and possibly miniatures games. Registration: \$3 at the door, or free entrance with last year's button. Contact: Theresia Conner, Rockford College, Campus Box 120, 5050 E. State Street, Rockford, IL 61108. Email: [connert@rockford.edu](mailto:connert@rockford.edu).

## Convention Listings Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

**Warning:** We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," *DRAGON® Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue SW., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been canceled, the

dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at (425) 254-2262 (U.S.A.).

**Important:** *DRAGON Magazine* does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

- ❖ Australian convention
- \* Canadian convention
- \* European convention



## APRIL CONVENTIONS

### Organized Kahn-fusion XXIII

**April 4** **PA**

Vigilant Fire Company, Columbia, PA. Events: Over 35 games, open gaming, dealers, and other activities. Registration: Varies from free to \$7. Contact: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 230 S. Eighth Street, Leymoyne, PA 17043. Email: maygam@postoffice.ptd.net.

### Minicon 33

**April 10-12** **MN**

Radisson Hotel, South Minneapolis, MN. Guests of Honor: Gardner Dozios, Dave Langford, and John M. Ford. Events: Art Show, Parties, Dealer's Room, SF Seminars, Gaming. For more information contact Minicon 33, Minnesota Science Fiction Society, Inc. P.O. Box 8297, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

### Noahcon

**April 17-19** **OH**

Elyria Holiday Inn, Elyria, OH. Over 25 hobby dealers. Events include: *Warhammer 40K* and AD&D tournaments. Contact: Matrix Games and Diversions, 5384 East Lake Road, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054. Email: matrix@centuryinter.net.

### Dudley Bug Ball 1998

**April 18** 

Dudley College of Technology, Dudley, West Midlands, UK. From 10:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. Tournaments include AD&D West Midlands Open, *Magic: the Gathering*, *Call of Cthulhu*\*, *Chivalry & Sorcery*\*, *Traveller*\*, plus many others. This is a premier independent competitive games convention in the heart of the UK, is sponsored by the Black Country Role Playing Society. Contact: Steve Turner at 94 Laurel Road, Dudley, West Midlands, UK. Email DudleyBug@aol.com.

### Ben Con '98

**May 22-24** **CO**

Denver Doubletree Hotel. Events: RPGA Network tournaments, including decathlon and LIVING CITY (Ravens Bluff and Procampur), LIVING JUNGLE™, LIVING DEATH, *Threads of Legend*, and *Virtual Seattle*. Other events: LARPs, Puffin' Billy, TCGs, war, miniature and board games, artists, authors, game designers,

charity auctions, seminars, dealers' room. All proceeds go to local charities. Registration: \$20, event fees \$1-3, demos free. Contact: Ken Ritchart, P.O. Box 19232, Boulder, CO 80308-2232. Email: Dragon0525@aol.com. Website: <http://www.bengames.org/~whitet/bencon/>.

### Havoc XIV

**April 25-26** **MA**

Fort Devens Gymnasium, Ayer, Mass. BGBoston, Inc.'s 14th annual wargaming convention. For general information contact: Peter Mancini at 200 Bedford Road, Apt. 17A, Woburn, MA 01801.

## MAY CONVENTIONS

### AgamemCon

**May 22-24** **CA**

Burbank Airport Hilton and Convention Center, Burbank, CA. Guests: David Eagle, Stephen Furst, Joshua Cox, Jeffery Willerth, Mark Altman, Stephen C. Smith, Richard Herd. Events: dealer's room, parties, art show, masquerade, video room, panels, and more. Contact: Agamemcon, 24161-H Hollyoak, Laguna Hills, CA 92656. Email orrock@ix.netcom.com.

### Games on the Horizon II

**May 29-31** **IN**

Days Inn, Portage, IN. Guests: Ken Whitman, Lester Smith, Tony Lee and Don Perrin. Events: roleplaying, CCG's, LARP, miniature games, board games, guest Demos. Other activities: RPGA (LIVING CITY, LIVING DEATH, and others), NASA car, *Battletech* and *Magic* tournaments, charity auction, guest signings. Registration: \$15 Pre-registration until May 1st, \$20 at door. For more information contact Games II, P.O. Box 1602 Portage, IN 46368 or email con-man1@gte.net worldwide web: <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Dungeon/6825>

## JUNE CONVENTIONS

### Milwaukee Summer Revel

**June 5-7** **WI**

The Inn Towne Hotel, 710 Old World Third Street, Milwaukee. Guests: Gary Gygax, Janet Pack, Tom Wham. Events: All first-run roleplaying events, including LIVING CITY and LIVING JUNGLE™

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tournaments, AD&D game, *Call of Cthulhu*, BOOT HILL™, *Paranoia*\*, board games, miniature events, war games, nonstop Dawn Patrol, TCGs, and the always exciting Wham-A-Thon. Other events: Seminars, dealer's area, game demonstrations, and strategic breaks for lunch and dinner. Registration: \$20. Contact: Bruce Rabe, Summer Revel, P.O. Box 779, New Munster, WI 53102.

### ManaFest 98

**June 12-14** **CA**

South San Francisco Conference Center, San Francisco, CA. ManaFest offers three days of gaming, covering collectable card games, classic and modern boards games, roleplaying miniatures. Activities include tournaments, special events, demonstrations, prizes, a game flea market, and an exhibit hall filled with game manufacturers. For more information contact ManaFest, P.O. Box 170436, San Francisco, CA 94090-6703, or email info@magicscroll.com



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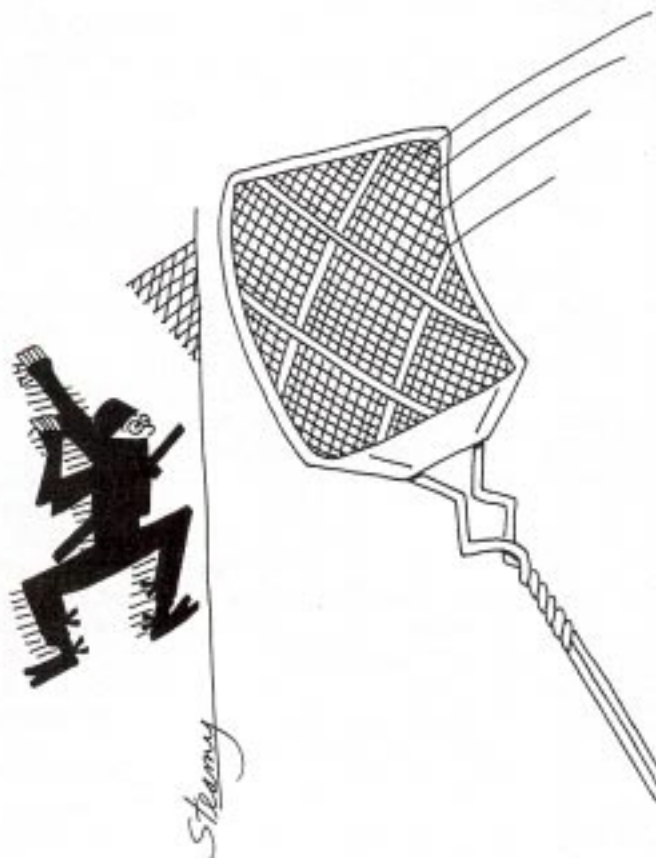
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By Steamy

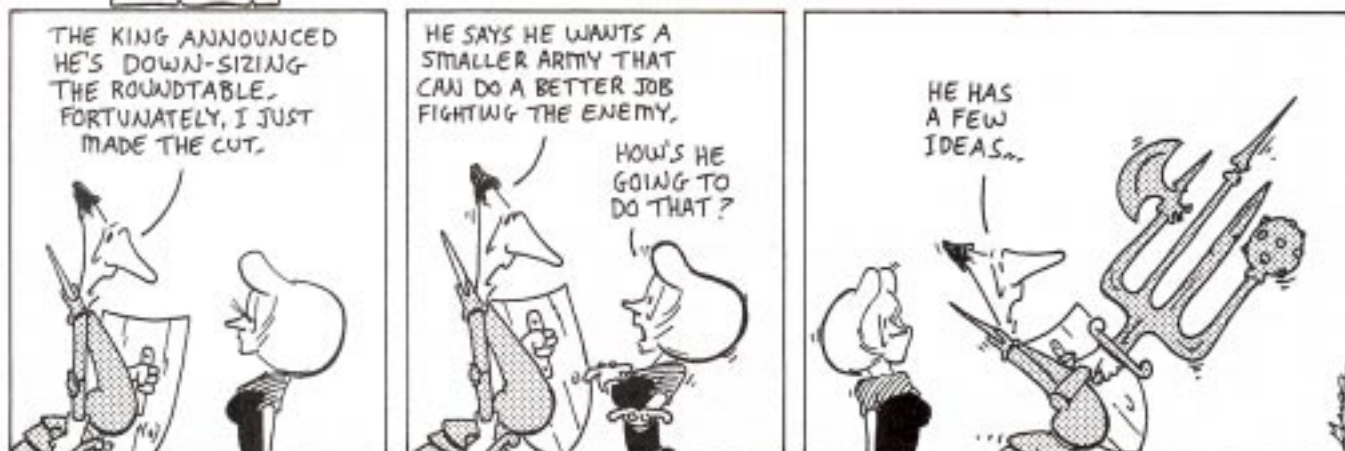
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"LET'S SEE ... YOU WANT 400 TEMPS, PHYSICALLY FIT, CLIMBING ABILITIES A PLUS, ABLE TO SWING HEAVY OBJECTS, AND WITH A PENCHANT FOR ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR."



by Mathew Guss

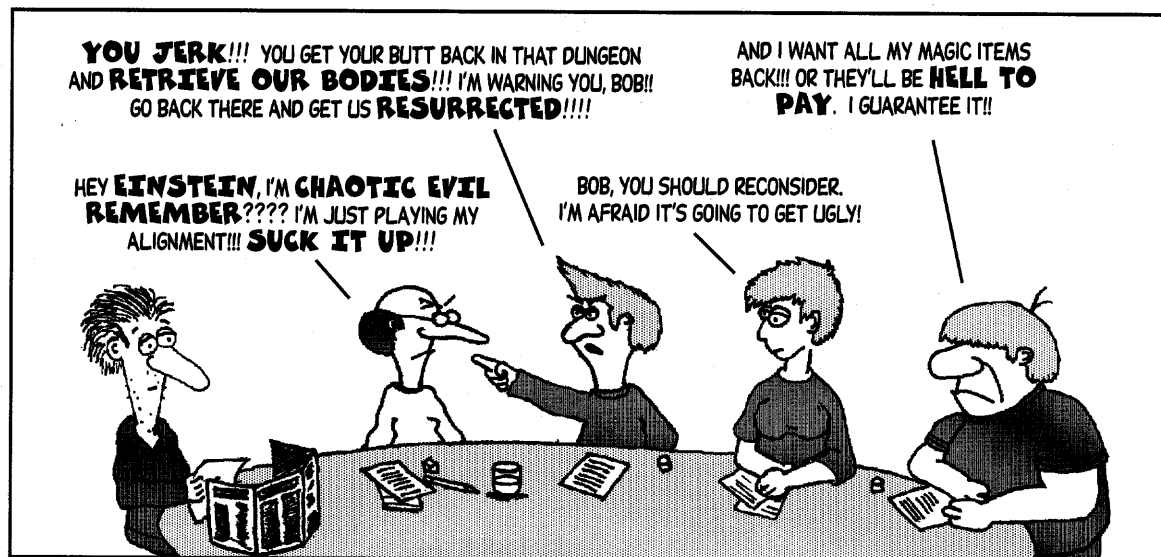




# DID YA KNOW

## Knights of the Dinner Table™

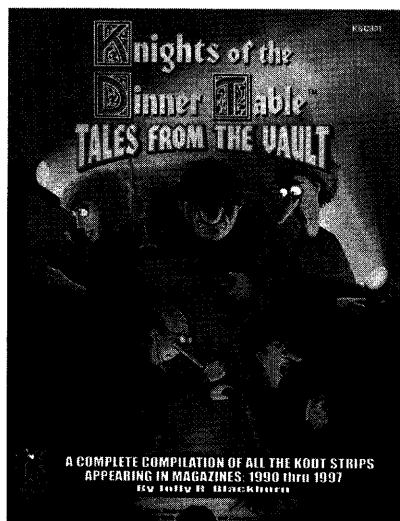
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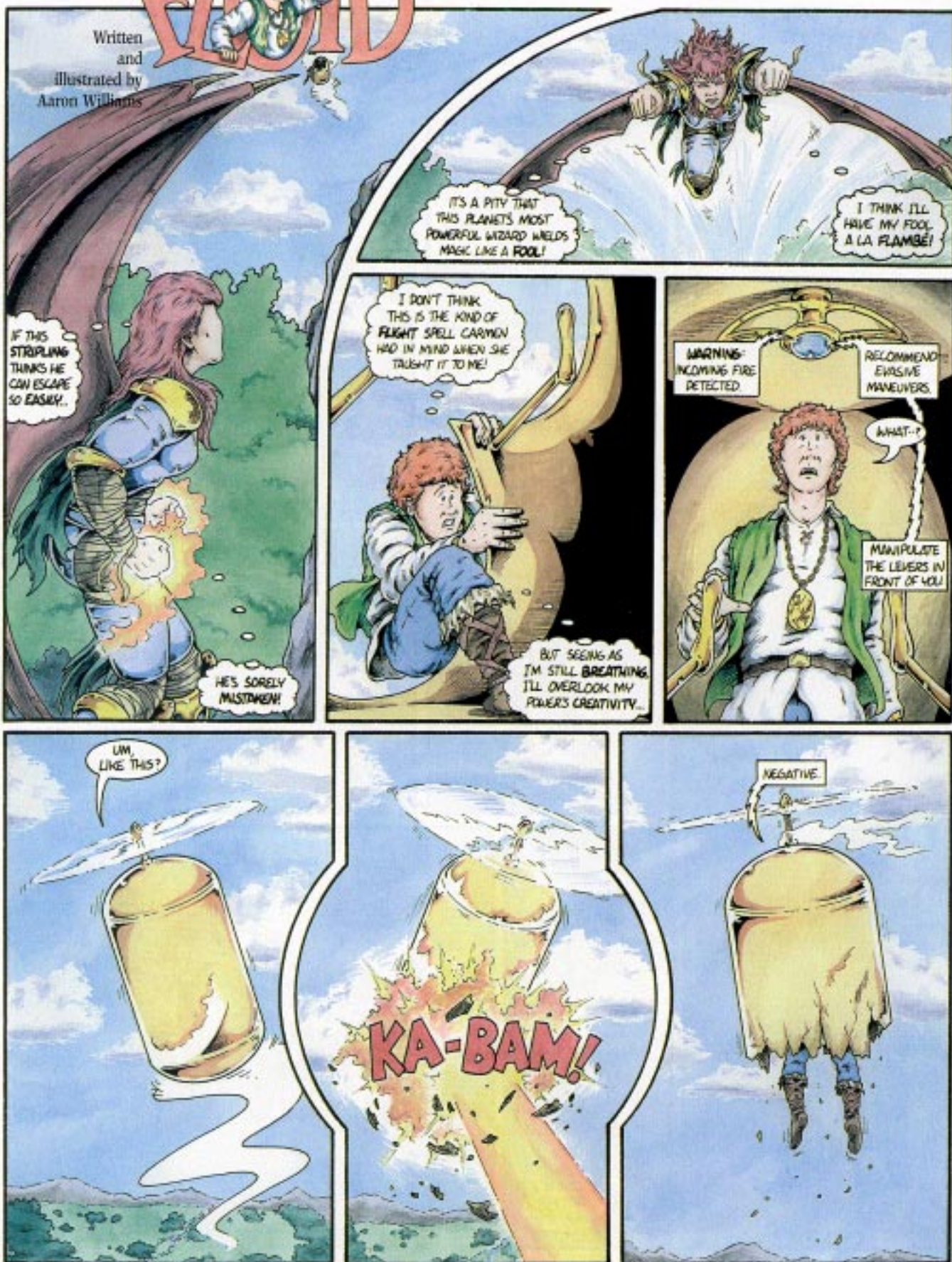
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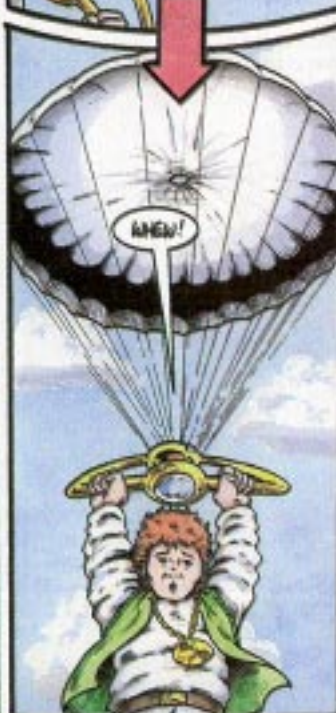


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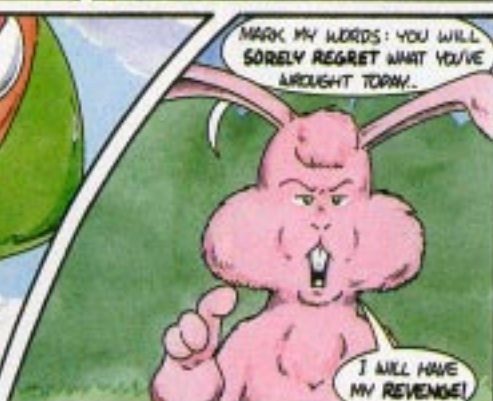




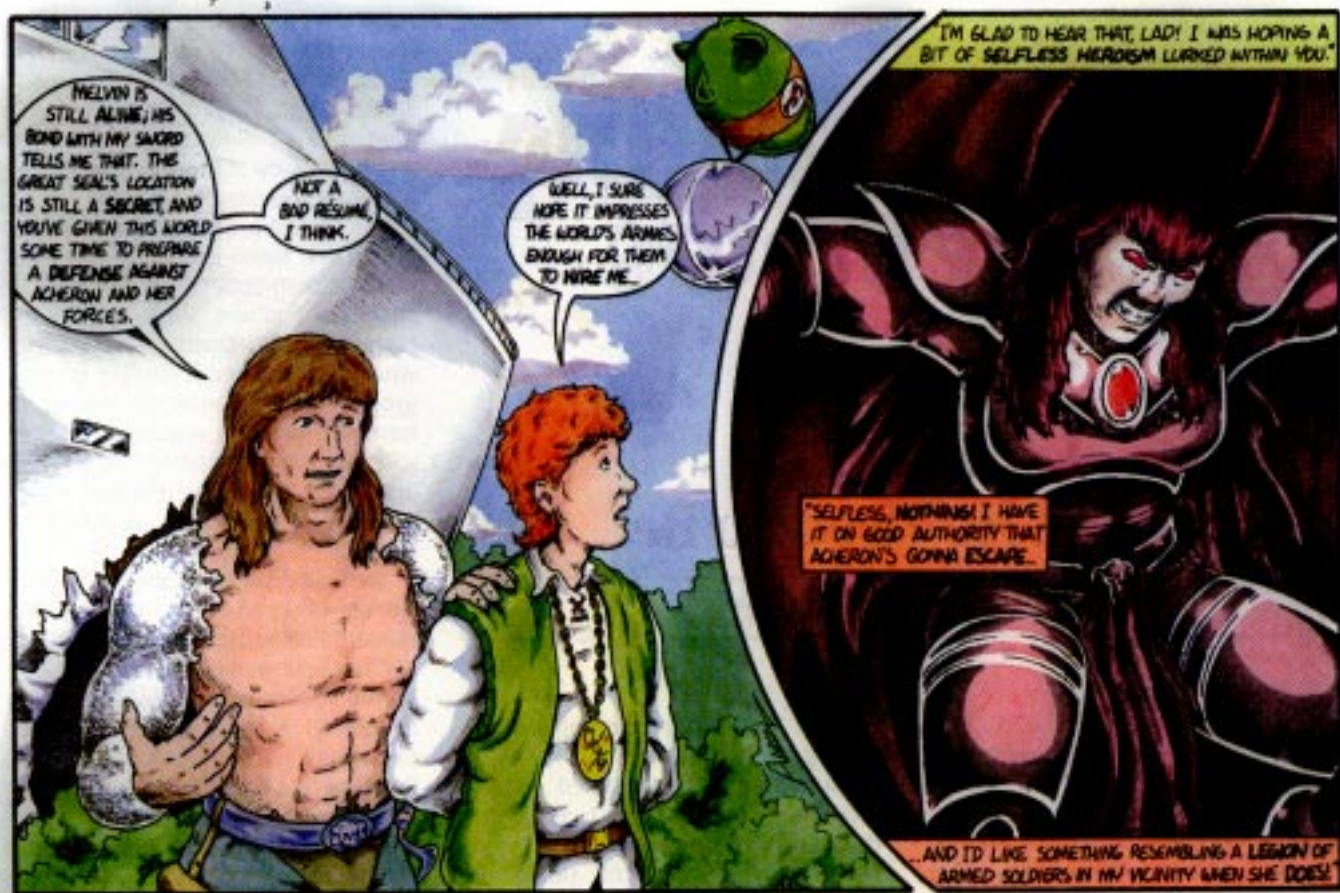












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*Acron*







## Cthulhu Isn't What He Used To Be

© 1997 Allen Varney

THERE WERE GIANTS IN THE EARTH in those days, or so it seemed in adventure gaming. Of course, at the hobby's vigorous dawn in the mid-1970s, most game publishers actually were doing well to occupy a tiny office instead of their parents' garage. Compared to today's Wizards of the Coast and Games Workshop, those primeval precursors resemble the shrew-like Mesozoic mammals that evolved, eons later, into us. Yet in the minds of gamers, the early companies bestrode the universe.

What titans! SPI, pumping out two to four wargames a month; Game Designers' Workshop, whose sprawling *Europa*\* board games simulated most of World War II's European theatre at *division level*; TSR, just starting to ramp up AD&D with the first hardcover *Monster Manual*; Metagaming, releasing Steve Jackson's classic early games (*Ogre/GEV*\*, *Melee*\*, *Wizard*\*) in its popular Microgame format; FGU and Judges Guild, publishing in virtually unedited form any RPG or module anyone sent them; and towering over them all, the remote and fog-shrouded peak of Avalon Hill.

Like tracers of light from a burst firework (to switch metaphors abruptly), they all raced away on twisting paths. Bad management sank SPI, and TSR swallowed it; over 15 years later, history repeated tragedy as comedy, when Wizards of the Coast swallowed

TSR but kept it a recognizable, functioning unit. Jackson broke with Metagaming and started Steve Jackson Games in 1980. FGU has dwindled to a single store in Arizona, where owner Scott Bizar hangs on tightly to such venerable trademarks as *Villains & Vigilantes*\*, *Bushido*\*, and *Space Opera*\*. Metagaming and Judges Guild joined the multitudes of Dead Texas Game Companies; GDW succumbed much later, in 1996. Avalon Hill has soldiered on, but its publicly traded parent company, Monarch Avalon, has lately hit hard times and looks ripe for takeover.

Of the other mid-'70s game publishers that once loomed so large in our imaginations, only Flying Buffalo and a few other shoestring operations survive. And one more, my favorite: Chaosium, founded by Greg Stafford in 1974.

Oakland-based Chaosium has won more awards than anyone else in the gaming industry. Starting with the fantasy wargames *White Bear and Red Moon*\* (1974) and *Dragon Pass*\* (1975), Stafford presented his marvelous mythic world of Glorantha, domain of legendary heroes and shamanistic god-cults. Glorantha manifested far more dramatically in *RuneQuest*\* (1976), a pioneering roleplaying game (designed by Steve Perrin and others) that provided the nucleus of Chaosium's staple "Basic Roleplaying"

(BRP) system. Distinguished by literate text, some amazing art, and elegant rules, RQ and other BRP games (*Stormbringer*\*, *Worlds of Wonder*\*, *Superworld*\*, *Elfquest*\*, *Ringworld*\*, *Thieves World*\*) started racking up a long shelf of industry trophies, later augmented by Stafford's superb non-BRP game, *Pendragon*\*.

But Chaosium, like the other 1970s publishers, faced change in the '80s: periodic cash-flow crises, a 1984 staff shakeup, and the 1985 sale of the high-flying *RuneQuest* to Avalon Hill, which soon piloted it straight into the ground. Yet what most strongly transformed Chaosium was the landmark success of its bestselling, most highly acclaimed BRP game: the first horror RPG, Sandy Petersen's *Call of Cthulhu*\* (1980).

Derived from the "Cthulhu Mythos" stories of Providence horror writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937), *CoC* has sold well over 100,000 copies in five American editions, plus many thousands overseas. Masterminded by Chaosium partner Lynn Willis and longtime line editor Keith Herber, *CoC*'s incomparable 1980s scenarios (*Musks of Nyarlathotep*, *Horror on the Orient Express*, *The Great Old Ones*, and dozens more) seduced a whole new cult of Lovecraft enthusiasts and remade Chaosium as "the Cthulhu company."

But Herber's departure in 1993, compounded by cash-flow problems and the card-game fad, blighted Chaosium's *CoC* support. In *King of Chicago* (1994) staging of horrific scenes, formerly a strong point in the line, is unimaginative or absent. ("Something vast and loathsome rises from the sea." Eek.) Low page count, colorless art and player handouts, blah layout, a lack of menace (*King of Chicago* features the first Cthulhoid monster you can kill with a flashlight)—these came to typify the line.

Fans have also come to expect sloppy proofreading and occasional bad writing. An all-too-typical excerpt from *Minions* (1997) produced out-of-house but published by Chaosium: "As the investigators enter the clearing they perceive the Deep Ones, wheezing and squatted together like whopping toads. Under the light of the stars little of their scabrous hides are visible [...] One of the three is seen to scoop the farmer's whimpering spaniel up from the ground and cram the terrified animal greedily past its mouth of



split and twisted fangs. With its forearms pushing away from its fishlike face, the Deep One scrapes the dangling leash from in between its teeth and peels back, in fleshy rolls, the extraneous fur from the dog."

Still, shouldn't we expect a 17-year-old game line to lose vigor? Yes, if it weren't for the counterexample of Pagan Publishing. In the last seven years, John Tynes's small Seattle company has produced the best *CoC* supplements since Chaosium's golden age: *Walker in the Wastes*, *Coming Full Circle*, *Grace Under Pressure*, and above all, the sensational *Delta Green* (1996) by wide agreement the finest campaign supplement ever published. Even a routine ghoulish hunt like *Realm of Shadows* (1997) becomes, with Pagan's imaginative presentation, a handsome and evocative expedition into fear. (Contact Pagan at PaganPub@aol.com; [www.tccorp.com/rev](http://www.tccorp.com/rev).)

Since Herber's acclaimed "Lovecraft Country" supplements (1990-93) Chaosium has apparently lost the vision that Pagan still displays. Three recent Chaosium *CoC* products embody a paradox: Good in themselves, they suffer in comparison to their illustrious forebears—so that their very virtues convey, to those with long memories, a faint disappointment.

## The New Orleans Guidebook

*Call of Cthulhu* 1920s supplement  
96-page softcover book

Chaosium, Inc. \$16.95

Design: Fred van Lente

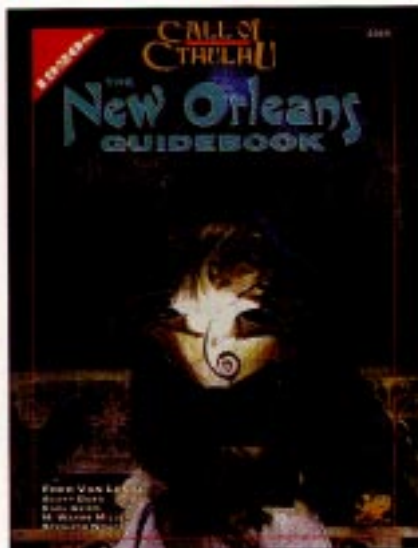
Additional material: James Cambias,  
Owen Guthrie & Toivo Luick, Kevin  
Ross, Chris Williams

Editing: Janice Sellers

Illustrations: Earl Geier, M. Wayne  
Miller

Cover: Scott Baxa

"With the possible exception of Innsmouth, Massachusetts, [1920s] New Orleans is the center of Cthulhu worship in the United States, and quite possibly the entire civilized world" (page 54 of *The New Orleans Guidebook*). A major flashback scene of Lovecraft's 1926 story "The Call of Cthulhu" takes place in New Orleans. Could there be a likelier place to worship that inhuman entity? The moist air lying thick as gumbo—chicory coffee and beignets, Faulkner and Jean Lafitte—the lassitude of drawling Big Easy citizens from half a dozen



strange cultures, hybrid or inbred or devoted to voodoo—remote oil rigs and Indian burial mounds in the gator-haunted bayou—and behind the French Quarter's iron grillework, a pervasive, festering corruption . . .

For many years *Call of Cthulhu* support consisted of short scenarios interspersed with long scenarios and, for a change of pace, *really* long scenarios. The editors treated campaign sourcebooks—locations, monsters, equipment—like you'd treat (say) an abyss of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, an eldritch contradiction of all matter, force, and cosmic order. (That's how Lovecraft introduced his top-billed baddie in "Call of Cthulhu.") *CoC* sourcebooks finally arrived a few years ago. Unfortunately, they were accompanied by Chaosium's production problems, so books like *Keeper's Compendium* and *Ye Booke of Monstres* proved only barely worth the wait.

The recent *Cairo* and *London Guidebooks* also drew lukewarm praise from regular *DRAGON®* Magazine reviewer Rick Swan (see "Roleplaying Reviews," issues #227 and #235). Rick praised these supplements for their depth of mundane research but wondered where the monsters were. The *New Orleans Guidebook* does a bit better in the spook department, with its Zobop sect (sort of a voodoo Mafia), La Santa Hermandad witch-hunters, lightless catacombs under the Vieux Carre (uh, wouldn't those be underwater?), and the Esoteric Order of Dagon's annual cultist convention. Fred van Lente also conveys the distinctive atmosphere of Bourbon Street, overgrown plantations, graveyards, and the rickety

waterfront. He turns up plenty of weird history; did you know that homeless people set up a colony, "Hotel Bastille," in the basement of the New Orleans Police Department?

And yet.... Recall *Arkham Unveiled's* first edition (1990). *New Orleans* lists two dozen nonplayer characters; *Arkham* gave over 100, plus block-by-block building descriptions, a town directory, four full scenarios, five pages of handouts, a huge map, and a 1928 issue of *The Arkham Advertiser*. These two supplements show the difference between a guidebook and a campaign setting.

Still, as a guidebook *New Orleans* does the job. Rick says anyone near a decent university can dig up all these city maps, prices, and museum hours for free. I don't know; I'd hate to try locating a plantation map (page 40), a photo of St. Roch's Cemetery (page 16), or a detailed description of a bayou oil-drilling rig (page 52). And *Call of Cthulhu*, in particular, needs off-beat stuff you never find in ordinary guidebooks: exact library hours, arcane bookshops, and where to buy dynamite. That's all here, along with pleasing period photos. A short section explains the basics of voodoo, though here you're better served by *GURPS Voodoo* or the like.

In the book's sole scenario, "Twilight of the Fifth Sun," we get a tour of many N'Awlins hotspots, plus a truly dreamy (pun intended) Mardi Gras ball and the first Cthulhu Mythos spell ever cast by—not *in*, but *by*—a conga line. For all its colorful scenery, the adventure's straightforward plot won't stymie a novice, let alone experienced *CoC* investigators. Ideal for tournaments, it's a laid-back, low-threat intro to the Big Easy.

**Evaluation:** Like the city it presents, *New Orleans Guidebook* charms us with atmosphere and flavor. But it's for tourists, not residents; this *Guidebook* doesn't delve deeply enough for a full campaign. Oh, for the days of *Kingsport* and *Return to Dunwich*!

By the way, the "Fifth Sun" of the scenario's title refers to a catastrophe from Mayan legend. In this scenario it's just a passing reference, but the idea leads us smoothly to *A Resection of Time*, Sam Johnson's modern-day *CoC* adventure centering on the ancient Central American culture of the Maya. Do I hear snores? Wake up!

## A Resection of Time: The Strange Case of Kyle Woodson

*Call of Cthulhu*\* modern-day  
scenario 64-page softcover book  
Chaosium, Inc. \$11.95

Design: Sam Johnson

Editing: Lynn Willis

Illustrations: Paul Carrick, Drashi

Khendup

Cover: Scott Baxa

My home town of Austin, Texas has become a center of Mayan epigraphic scholarship—or, to say it in English, deciphering ancient Mayan hieroglyphics. This subject is at least 30 times more interesting than you think, and Sam Johnson knows it. In the modern-day scenario **A Resection of Time**, Johnson's hapless scholar, Kyle Woodson, refers often to real-world Mayan experts here in Austin, which in my view automatically ups *Resection's* Cool Factor a notch.

The Maya have shown up in *Call of Cthulhu* before (see Doug Lyons's "The Pits of Bental-Dolum" in *Cthulhu Classics*), but only to provide scenery: stepped pyramids, human sacrifices—the usual Hollywood backdrop. In *Resection* this fascinating culture comes alive, metaphorically speaking. Easing us into an archaeologist's mindset, Johnson smoothly tells just enough about the Mayans' mysterious hieroglyphs, so that educated players can spot the weird anomalies that sent Kyle Woodson down to Belize; following his trail there, they can decode the unspeakable history in the murals of the El Cacao temple complex. By puzzling it all out themselves instead of just rolling dice,

players come to feel like Indiana Jones, or at least like an Indiana Jones whose mind is snapping like a brittle twig.

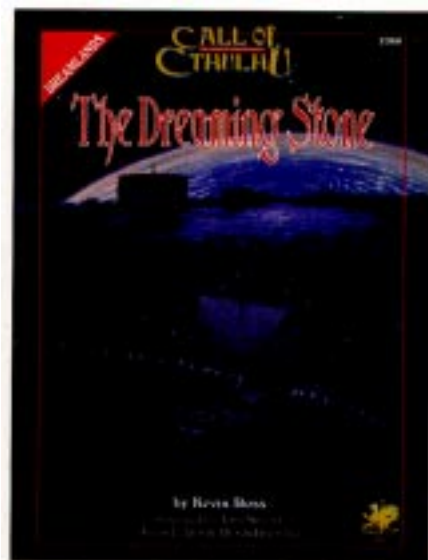
(SPOILER WARNING! Next up: secret plot details of **A Resection of Time**. Non-keepers, skip ahead to the paragraph labeled "Evaluation.")

This being *Call of Cthulhu*, Woodson has discovered things about the Maya that sane people were not meant to know. This scenario's twist is that the player characters have also discovered these things—but they don't remember! Woodson and all the investigators went down to the Yucatan a few years back and had a run-in with "cocaine smugglers." These were, in fact, those ever-popular insectile experimenters, the mi-go, who selectively edited the investigators' memories to conceal their presence (the "resection" of the title). During the suspenseful adventure, the players receive handouts describing their tormented nightmares, and eventually all memory returns in a vivid, sanity-blasting finale.

This neat but impractical practical joke reveals *Resection's* ancestry as a tournament module (Texi-Con '92). In tournaments, you can mess freely with the psyches of pregenerated characters, but in a campaign this kind of retroactive continuity revision ("retconning," as they say in comic-book fandom) doesn't fly.

Also, tournament adventures sometimes rely heavily on canned, carefully staged scenes that roll onward regardless of player actions. For all its considerable virtues, **Resection** has too many of these, including a couple of pitched battles specifically choreographed so investigators can only stand in the crossfire and watch. How can you feel like Indiana Jones then? You might as well be one of the mi-go's brain cylinders—which, by the way, this adventure lets you become!

**Evaluation:** **A Resection of Time** fits awkwardly into an ongoing *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, but it's pretty sharp as a one-shot. In more prosperous times, Chaosium might have done up its two dozen handouts in vintage style, on appropriate paper stock. But such luxuries must have proven unprofitable in the past, so we should just be glad that *Resection's* imaginative story and excellent historical grounding recall the best days of CoC.



## The Dreaming Stone

*Call of Cthulhu*\* Dreamlands scenario  
64-page softcover book  
Chaosium, Inc. \$11.95

Design: Kevin Ross

Editing: Shannon Appel

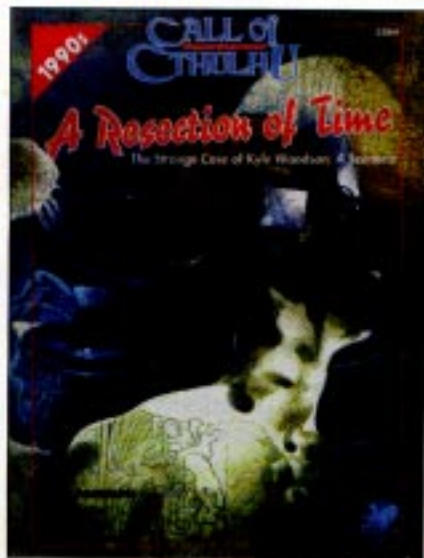
Cover and illustrations: John Snyder

Additional art: Jason Eckhardt,

Drashi Khendup, Earl Geier

I really like **The Dreaming Stone** and think it long overdue—but I might be alone. It's set in the Dreamlands, the enchanting fairy-tale world seen in Lovecraft's "Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath" and other tales inspired by Irish fantasist Lord Dunsany (1878-1957). Conventional wisdom has it that the Dreamlands tales are early work, but Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi dates "Dream-Quest" to 1926-27, after HPL wrote "The Call of Cthulhu." "Dream-Quest" is my own favorite Lovecraft story, but I've never met anyone who agrees.

*Call of Cthulhu* purists are skittish about the Dreamlands setting, as they might be about the distorted and monstrous anatomies spawned by manifold fission from the abominable, quivering gray protoplasm of Abhoth. The Dreamlands explicitly tie into the Mythos, but they're so—so whimsical. There you can ride an elephant caravan through the perfumed jungles of Kled, climb a mile-long golden rope to the floating marble city of Serranian, or jump to the Moon on a cat's back. Granted, the Dreamlands includes plenty of nightmares: cloudbests and Leng spiders, nightgaunts and Nyarlathotep, and colossal dholes burrowing through the dire Vale of Pnath. But perhaps Lovecraft fans feel





that once you've ridden a cat to the Moon, any sense of cosmic horror is pre-emptively blown.

Chaosium hasn't helped much. Four editions of its perfunctory *Dreamlands* supplement fail to offer any vision of what to do there. Now stalwart designer Kevin Ross, once called Grand Archivist of the *CoC* Circle, has taken a decent shot in the longest published *Dreamlands* scenario to date. (It works with fifth-edition *CoC* and any *Dreamlands* edition.)

**The Dreaming Stone**, named for a nasty artifact, practically throws waking-world investigators down the Seven Hundred Steps to Deeper Slumber. Trapped in the *Dreamlands*, the PCs search for the dream-form of their insufferable rival, occultist Byron Humphreys. But when they reach the River God's temple, and golden-spired Thran, and the Yellow Manticore inn in Hlanith, they must face all the angry citizens that the overbearing Humphreys has annoyed. Then it's off over the world's edge to the Dark Side of the Moon; experienced investigators might have visited this forbidding land in "The Pits of Bendal-Dolum," mentioned above. Here stands the mansion of lunar autocrat Vredni Vorastor. (Roleplaying challenge! Vorastor "combines the cruelty and bloodlust of Vlad the Impaler with the mocking wit of Marlowe's Mephistopheles, tempered with the brooding melancholy of a Byronic anti-hero.") And I haven't even mentioned the jousting tournament, the River God's Pearl, over-friendly goblins, the dungeon, and even archaic random-encounter tables.

You see why a true-blue Cthulhu fan might sneer. Purists, stop sneering. **The Dreaming Stone** presents many creepy encounters: larvae of the Outer Gods, a narcotic fungus garden, Vorastor's sadistic child-wife Lucerna, the mocking Whisperer in the Windmill, and much more. Behind it all lurks a major Mythos nemesis, whose handiwork occasionally surges forward to destroy a few Sanity points. For instance, imagine fighting off a small, wretched black figure covered with fur, then searching its corpse and finding the tatters of a Vermont drivers license.

**Stone** also displays its *CoC* roots in subtler ways. Players who charge through it hacking and slashing, as in a routine fantasy, face certain doom. Whether negotiating with a treacherous

Lengite ship-captain, finding the transformed Byron Humphreys, or tensely talking with their Cthulhoid nemesis, investigators must be as wary as in any waking mission. Even in the *Dreamlands*, *CoC* demands mature caution.

**Evaluation:** **The Dreaming Stone** is more than a pretty good adventure; it's a demonstration of how to adventure in the neglected *Dreamlands*. The scenario goes wrong in encrusting its dream-fantasy with obsolete random encounters and gratuitous Christian imagery, but it still establishes a characteristically Lovecraftian atmosphere amid gaudy wonders. With **Stone's** far-ranging storyline, a good keeper might make willing dreamers out of even the most haughty Cthulhu Mythos devotees.

Yet though **Stone** compares well with some other recent *Call of Cthulhu* products, its poor layout, skimpy artwork, and lousy proofreading make it one more data-point on a disappointing graph. After almost five years of well conceived but decrepitiy executed releases, Chaosium's flagship line needs a graphic overhaul and a visionary line editor to restore the glory days of the 1980s. However feebly those tentacles twitch now, the occasion gem like **A Resection of Time** shows there's plenty of eldritch life in them yet.

## Veddy British WWW RPGs

I can't claim familiarity with the dozens, even hundreds of home-brew paper RPGs that amateur designers have self-published on the World Wide Web. The few I've seen strike me as knockoffs of popular games or attempts at the One True Universal System. More power to them; I believe that if you can't find a rules system you like among the hundreds published, you never will until you design your own. A good list of these games is "Coron's Sources of Free Role Playing Games and Settings" ([www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/1557/freerpgs.htm](http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/1557/freerpgs.htm)). Note that these are tabletop RPGs with free downloadable text rules, not Internet computer games.

The Web RPGs that most interest me have offbeat, esoteric, or incredibly uncommercial premises. The medium is ideal: If you published your *Orange: The Ripening* game on paper, you'd waste thousands of copies and lose your shirt. Instead, post the rules

on the Web and let the six people on Earth who want to roleplay citrus fruit download them. You're not out a nickel, and you've saved landfill space.

For instance, take John Tynes's **Puppetland\*** (1995). This short, surreal storytelling game by Pagan Publishing's founder casts the players as finger, hand, shadow, and marionette puppets on the shores of a lake of milk and cookies. The megalomaniac Punch has killed the gentle human Maker. With six brutal Nutcrackers called Punch's Boys, he has become Puppet Town's cruel tyrant. The players seek Punch's estranged mate, Judy, who caught the Makers last tear in a silver thimble and can use it to restore the Maker. Stories last exactly one hour by the clock; players may speak only in character, expressing their actions as puppet dialogue; the "puppet master" narrates all action in the past tense, as if reading from a children's book. *Puppetland* did hit print last year in the late British magazine *arcane*, but you see it's not a socko commercial idea. Yet it intrigues and disturbs me, and I'm glad it exists at [www.tccorp.com/rev/rpuppetland.html](http://www.tccorp.com/rev/rpuppetland.html).

I'll praise three more Web RPGs, not because you'll like these specific games—chances are you won't—but to show how the Internet fosters creativity in obscure niches. Remember, if these three bore you, there might be others out there you'll love!

**The Skool Rools\*** by Phil Masters ([www.taynet.co.uk/~gdx/users/masters/index.htm](http://www.taynet.co.uk/~gdx/users/masters/index.htm)). In this abbreviated RPG, Masters (designer of *Kingdom of Champions* and several GURPS supplements, including the forthcoming *GURPS Discworld*) satirizes the British Public School system, without which "the British Empire would certainly not be where it is today." Acidulous rules, laced with misspellings, pit "bold noble and fearless BOYS (cheers cheers cheers)" against "countless masters, swots, creeps, toadies, bullies, parents, lessons and SKOOL DINNERS." BOYS characteristics include Branes, Lying, and Digestion; MASTERS include Kane, Order, Paranoia, and Sanity. The game bemuses and sometimes puzzles this American reader, but it assuredly conveys the authors personal experience.

**The Drones\*** by Ian Crowther, Sheila Thomas, and Victoria Uren ([www.granta.demon.co.uk/drones/index.html](http://www.granta.demon.co.uk/drones/index.html)): Subtitled "A light-hearted after-dinnerish roleplay game," this

unauthorized roleplaying game barely rubs the serial numbers off Jeeves and Bertie Wooster, the most famous creations of comic novelist P.G. Wodehouse (1881-1975). In the game, as in Wodehouse's hilarious stories, upper-class British twits strive to win boat races, purloin their aunts fish steamer, extricate themselves from undesirable fiancées, and bet on the annual Fat Uncle sweepstakes. Character statistics include The Readies (wealth), The Old Grey Matter, Appearance, and Vim & Vigour. "Fighting in Drones is very rare and not usually encouraged. There's the occasional scuffle, such as happens . . . when Pingo Bottle was debagged and tied to the chandelier last Tuesday week." If you're not a Wodehouse fan yet, find one of his books and become one.

**Forgotten Futures\*** by Marcus Rowland ([www.ffutures.demon.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.ffutures.demon.co.uk/index.htm)): A very substantial and admirable shareware RPG from one of Britain's top designers, based on the British "scientific romances" popular a century ago. Five separate releases, distributed on disk, contain simple but serviceable rules, the complete text of two or more stories, a worldbook based on the stories, adventures, maybe a character design spreadsheet, and pictures in .GIF format. Note that these games are (cheap) shareware, not free.

Release I, *The A.B.C. Files*, adapts Rudyard Kipling's 21st-Century airship utopia. Release III, based on Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor Challenger series, includes the complete novels *The Lost World* and *The Poison Belt*. Other *Forgotten Futures* releases use the "Carnacki the Ghost Finder" tales of William Hope Hodgson (1877-1918), "Stories of Other Worlds" (A.K.A.

*Honeymoon in Space*) by George Griffith (1857-1906), and "the destruction of London, as seen by a variety of authors around the turn of the century. See London succumb to volcanoes, snow, fire, Yankee commercialism, and other disasters."

Rowland intends *Forgotten Futures* to "ensure that the stories will stay in circulation into the 21st century, and introduce them to a new generation of readers." Aside from the game's real virtues, this worthy mission makes *Forgotten Futures* a must for any fan of science fiction's early history.

What, that doesn't include you? Fair enough—it's a big world. Why not fire up your Web browser and look for an RPG that suits your own interests?

## Short and Sweet

**Technomancer's Toybox**, by Bill Bridges, Phil Brucato, Brian Campbell, Roger Caudreau, Angel Leigh McCoy, Judith McLaughlin, and John R. Robey. White Wolf Game Studio, \$15. This collection of magickal equipment for *Mage: The Ascension\** will undoubtedly prove popular—gadget books always do—but I can't think of a game that needs it less than *Mage*. When a Virtual Adept can bend reality to his Awakened will, should he really spend time fiddling with a Trusty Wrist-Unit Rote Processor (TWURP)? But okay, I see how Doc Eon's Lemurian Lightning Gun and the flying car Chitty Chitty—whoops! I mean "Vrum Vrum Boom"—can add flavor to a Sons of Ether Chronicle. And a Storyteller who's running dry of ideas can boost his Technomancers with Black Helicopters, Scout Drones, Plastiskin, and Cephalic VCRs. But beware of bringing in reality-mangling devices like Zelly's Eternal

Theatre (dolls that act out the future) or the Jangler Pod (half the time it heals you of any injury, the other half it shreds you alive).

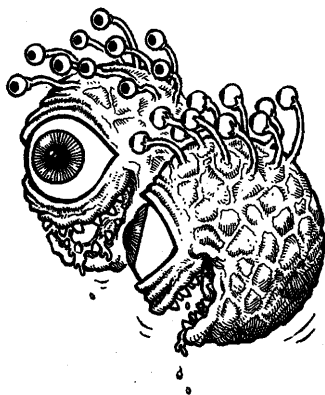
You know, White Wolf staffers make big claims for their products, but I think their production staff must be way overworked. Most WW supplements have dull, pour-it-on-the-page layouts; maybe the art relates to the text, maybe not. **Technomancer's Toybox** at least manages to match the pictures to the words, but it still suffers in comparison to, say, a typical FASA equipment book, where every gadget is illustrated.

**Aliens Predator\*** Customizable Card Game, by Precedence Publishing (John Myler, Ran Ackels, Paul W. Brown III, David Hewitt, Ted Kraver). HarperPrism, \$8.95 (60-card starter), \$2.95 (15-card booster). Aliens kill everything that moves, the Predator stealthily picks off armed opponents for their Honor value, and Colonial Marines try to rescue civilians without dying. If you need more explanation of this exciting three-player trading card game, you don't watch many movies. **Aliens Predator** is easy to learn, flexible in its variety of scenarios, and fast-playing depending on the scenario. Play location cards, move your characters from card to card (decoy tokens allow hidden movement), roll a six-sider to fight (but don't get too close to the acid-blooded Aliens!), then play equipment and character cards when you "search" the location.

The beauty of **Aliens Predator** is the way each side obeys slightly different rules that encourage its characteristic strategies. Aliens attack-attack-attack, breed-breed-breed; the Predator hangs back, equipping himself, then carefully stalks his prey. Buy the three semi-fixed starters; that's really all you need for an endlessly replayable, adrenaline-pumping game Bravo!

Allen Varney ([APVarney@aol.com](mailto:APVarney@aol.com)) has written for over a dozen RPG lines. Most recently he contributed a section to *Biohazard Games' first Blue Planet supplement*, Archipelago.

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By David Hanson

"HOW MUCH LONGER DO YOU THINK IT'S GONNA TAKE TO 'STARE THESE GUYS DOWN'?"



# Re: Views

Date: Thu, 19 Nov 97 13:22:00 PDT

From: lester smith <lester@pensys.com>

To: DRAGON Magazine <dragon@wizards.com>

## Big Eyes, Small Mouth\* Game

96-page, 9" x 6", perfect-bound book  
Guardians of Order \$13.95  
c/o Mark MacKinnon, 176 Janefield  
Ave, Unit #300, Guelph, Ontario, Canada  
N1G 2L6.

Website: <http://www.angelfire.com/biz/guardiansorder>

Design: Mark MacKinnon

Editing: Karen McLarney

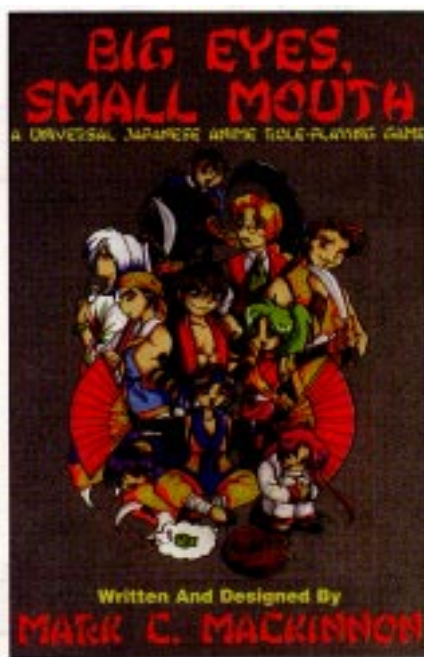
Illustrations: Aimo, Karen McLarney,  
Sean McLeod, Theodore Serafica, Paul  
Wynns

If you like *anime* (Japanese animation), then you should certainly take a look at the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* RPG. In a hobby where, all too often, games seem to be published without a clear vision of their topic or audience (fantasy games with combat rules so intricate they would put General Colin Powell to sleep, comedy games with text as dense as encyclopedias, serious games that "seriously" wimp out when it comes to mechanics, and generic systems that sometimes stretch just a bit too far), *BESM* stands out as an example of a product that knows its subject and treats it right.

First, the layout of the book shows forethought. The introduction gives a quick history of the genre, followed by a short introduction to roleplaying, then lets the reader know that the rules here are fast and simple. Next comes character creation, with a seven-step flowchart to keep players right on track: from initial concept and discussion with the GM; through generation of stats (body, mind, and soul), attributes (skills and special abilities), and defects; to final details and polish. After that comes "Combat and Other Actions," detailing dice use in the game (2d6 vs. a related stat) and the choreography of combat (again, with a simple flowchart to keep things moving). The final chapter discusses the universe of anime, the role of players and game master, and various settings and themes for adventures. Finally, there is an extensive "Resources" section, with glossary, bibliography, newsgroup and web addresses, a thorough index, and bios of the people involved in the project. Throughout, tables and charts are clearly laid out, for easy comprehension and reference.

The book is chock full of artwork, with a picture on nearly every page. None of that art is bad; much of it is quite good; and it all evokes the *anime* spirit. The character sheet shows some inventiveness as well, being distinctive without being gimmicky.

The writing is appropriately light and friendly, in a matter-of-fact sort of way, making for an easy read. It's fairly simple to create a character in this game, and the options are open-ended. Although it only takes about five minutes to design a PC, there is plenty of room for individuality.



Players are asked to envision their characters first, then choose stats and abilities, using the game mechanics to represent those characters. The result is unique characters without intricacy of rules.

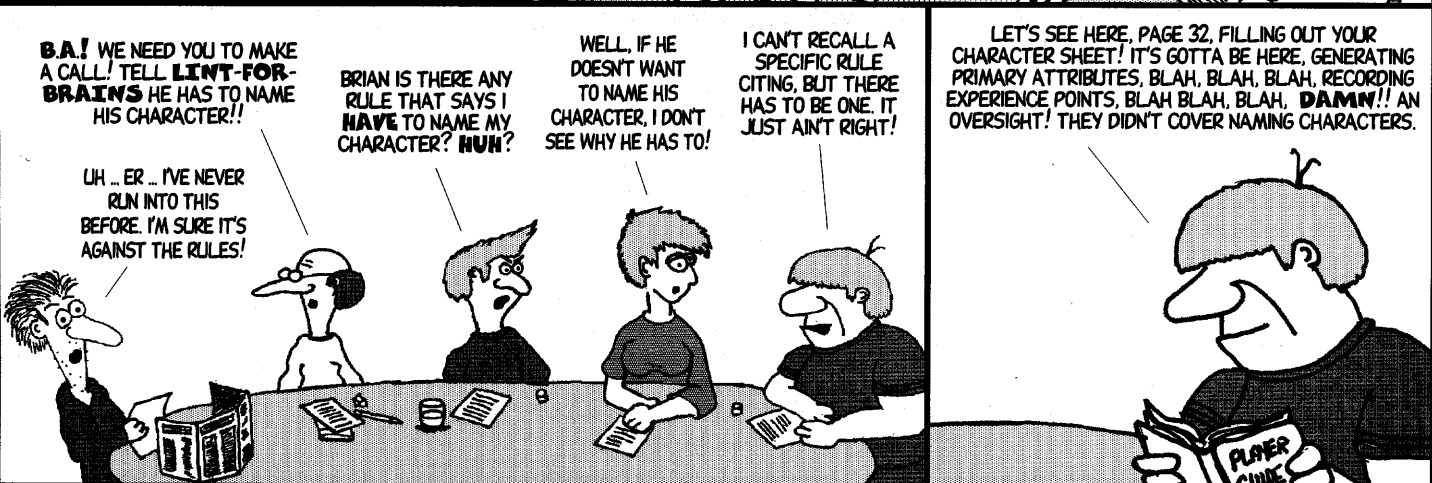
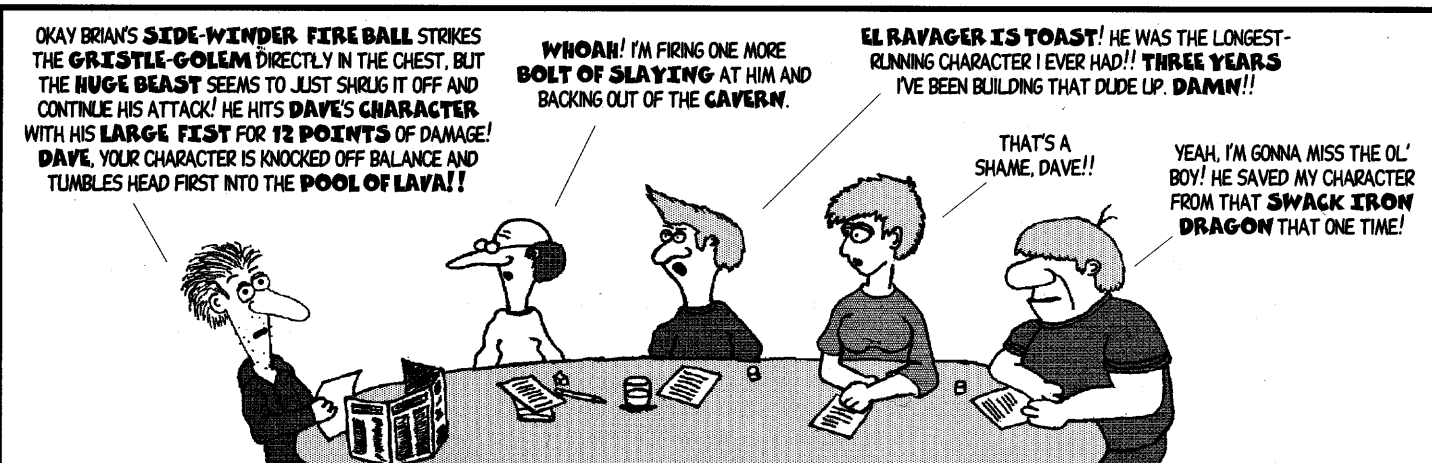
*BESM's* dice mechanic is simple, but there are enough options to make it feel like a game. Normally players roll 2d6 vs. one of a character's three stats, determined by which ability is being tested. (Acrobatics tests Body, for instance.) Modifiers might apply for particularly easy or difficult tasks, but a 2 always succeeds and a 12 always fails.

In combat, personal initiative is determined by adding a 1d6 roll to Attack Combat Value (ACV), with the highest result going first and counting down. Unless a character has a special ability to conduct more than one attack at a time, each combatant can make one attack at his or her initiative. Each can also make one defense roll when attacked, which means that being targeted by multiple attackers really sucks. Melee damage is a flat rating equal to the attacker's ACV, with a damage bonus added from any weapon. Ranged weapon damages are flat ratings, as well. If the attacker rolled a 2 to hit, the target gets no roll to defend, and another 1d6 roll is made to see if extra damage is done: 1-3 means double damage; 4-5 means triple, and 6 means an instant kill (which, while brutal, is at 1:216 odds).

My only real complaint with the system involves weapon damage. As things stand, there is no reason not to just pick the largest, most damaging weapon. Weapons don't cost anything—they're chosen as part of the character concept—and they don't penalize initiative or movement for their bulk. I play with a house rule that holding a weapon simply doubles your normal damage rating. That is more in keeping with the tone of the rest of the rules. Players should also be warned that combat can run on for a while without any blows being landed if two combatants are skilled in both attack and defense. Still, the result it feels right for anime combat, with hefty blows being narrowly dodged or blocked. The action is definitely bigger-than-life.

For fans of *anime*, then, I highly recommend the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* RPG. It is just about perfect for what it sets out to accomplish. Even if you aren't an *anime* fan, I recommend that you give the game a look anyway. It might just introduce you to a whole new world of adventure.







WHY YOU WANT TO BE A TROUBLE MAKER? WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO CALL YOU?

HEY IT'S KEWL NOT HAVING A NAME! I'M LIKE THAT DUDE IN THOSE WESTERNS, **THE MAN WITH NO NAME!!**

OKAY, SO WE'RE PLAYING WITH THE **MAN WITH NO NAME**. LET'S GET BACK TO THE GAME!

IF HE DOESN'T PICK A NAME, I **WILL!!**

WE'LL JUST CALL YOU **MONKEY BOY** WHEN WE NEED TO ADDRESS YOU. HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT??

YEAH! HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT, **MONKEY BOY**? YOU READY TO PLAY?

I DON'T KNOW WHO YER TALKIN' TO BECAUSE I WON'T ANSWER TO THAT NAME. YOU HEAR ME?

CAN WE PLEASE GET BACK TO THE GAME??

**THIRTY MINUTES LATER...**

OKAY THE **ORC-LORD** SWINGS AND HITS BOB FOR FOUR POINTS OF DAMAGE. MEANWHILE THE OTHER **ORC** HITS ... UH ... **MONKEY BOY** FOR FIVE POINTS OF DAMAGE.

DAVE? YOU DIDN'T MARK DOWN THAT DAMAGE!

OOOOH, THEN I GUESS YOU WON'T MIND IF I LAY A COUPLE OF FIREBALLS DOWN ON **MONKEY BOY'S BUTT!!**

NO, I DIDN'T! I'M NOT MONKEY BOY!

I'M GONNA WASTE THAT CREEP!!

**A FEW MINUTES LATER...**

NOW WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

GIVE ME A SECOND! I'M DRAWING SOMETHING!!

OKAY, I WISH TO MAKE A **FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT!** CAN I HAVE EVERYONE'S ATTENTION?

HURRY UP! I CAME TO PLAY!

HEY MAYBE HE'S GONNA GIVE HIS CHARACTER A NAME! THOSE FIREBALLS MUST HAVE WORKED!!

WHAT'S UP, DAVE?

QUIET EVERYONE! **MONKEY BOY** SPEAKETH!

THE **FIRST LEVEL FIGHTER** FORMERLY KNOWN AS "**THE MAN WITH NO NAME**"—AND IRREVERENTLY REFERRED TO IN CERTAIN CIRCLES AS **MONKEY BOY**—WILL NOW BE KNOWN BY THIS **SYMBOL!** I'LL MAKE A COPY FOR EACH OF YOU SO YOU CAN HOLD IT UP WHEN YOU ARE ADDRESSING MY CHARACTER!!

WHAT IS THAT? AN ICE CREAM SPOON OR SOMETHING?

**GREAT!** IT'LL MAKE A PERFECT TARGET FOR MY NEXT **FIREBALL!**



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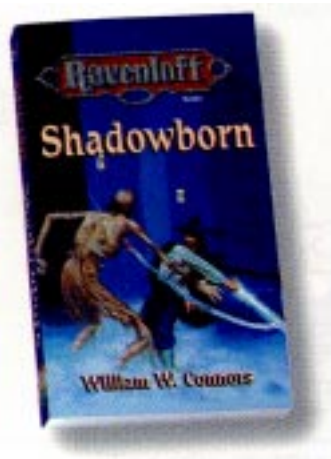
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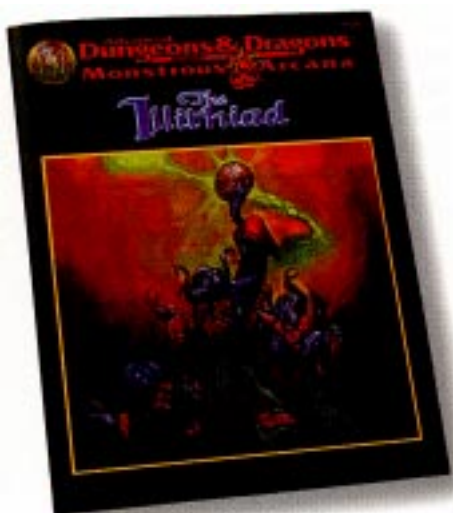
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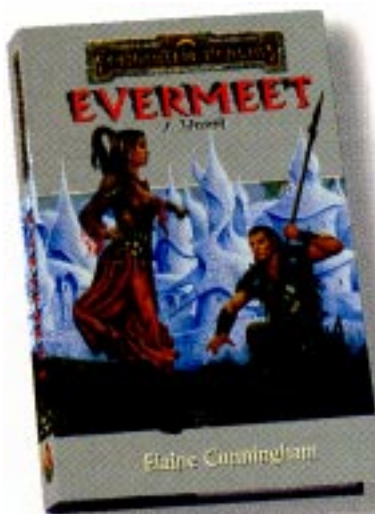
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## Troy Denning

Troy Denning co-created the DARK SUN® campaign setting and has written 15 novels, including the new FORGOTTEN REALMS® paperback, *Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad* (February, \$5.99).

# Profiles

by Allen Varney

HAVING WRITTEN 15 NOVELS, including the "Prism Pentad" for the DARK SUN® setting (1991-93), Troy Denning has distilled his philosophy of writing to a single doctrine: "Grab the reader's attention in the first line and hold it 'til the last. Everything else is technique."

That said, the technique has proven challenging. Take Denning's PLANESCAPE® hardcover *Pages of Pain* (1996). The editor assigned it to him in good-news—bad-news terms: "I want you to write a hardback. The bad news is, it's about the Lady of Pain." Denning recalls the difficulty. "It had to be from the Lady of Pain's viewpoint—which is something of a problem, since (as every PLANESCAPE player knows) she never speaks—and (this was the really good part) the reader must know less about her at the end of the book than he does at the beginning, and nobody knows anything about her at the beginning."

Would you cry defeat? Denning rose to the task, showing his characteristic desire to improve his craft. *Pages of Pain* "really made me rethink the way I approach stories, and for that reason alone it was worth writing. It also ended up being a much deeper book than I had ever written before, which I think was a result of the extreme approach I was forced to take. Those who have [read it] seem to think it's my best work. It was certainly the most challenging and—forgive the pun—'painful' to write."

Though Denning's novels have won him many fans, and he has formed lasting friendships with some of his readers, he started as a game designer. Joining TSR in 1981, he was promoted a year later to Manager of Designers, then moved to the book department. After two years managing the Pacesetter game company and a stint at Mayfair Games, Denning went freelance and wrote TSR's third "Avatar Trilogy" novel, *Waterdeep* (under the house name Richard Awlinson). In October 1989 he rejoined TSR as a senior designer, co-creating the setting for which he is still best known: the wasted desert planet of Athas—the world of the DARK SUN setting.

Denning says that he, Tim Brown, and Mary Kirchoff envisioned "a world for experienced DMs that would push the AD&D® game to its limits and let people do things like play half-giants and thri-kreen and superstrong characters—in short, all the really neat stuff we

wanted to do ourselves, but that everybody kept saying would ruin game balance." And how well did DARK SUN turn out? "It did what we wanted it to, and it has attracted a devoted following. When I go to conventions, it's still what people want to talk about. Talking Brom into being the lead artist early was very fortunate for us; he would sketch weird creatures and settings and equipment, and we'd work them into the game." On the other hand, Denning considers Athas's ubiquitous psionics "too cumbersome as is. I don't think every creature and NPC must have it; if we redid the set, I would give all PCs their wild talents, but otherwise psionics would be a rare thing."

Denning went freelance again in 1991, writing the bestselling 'Pentad' and the FORGOTTEN REALMS "Twilight Giants" trilogy (1994-95), among others. Then, because his *Waterdeep* had depicted the apotheosis of the humans Midnight and Cyric, he had the chance to write about them again in his newest book, *Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad*. It continues the story told in *Waterdeep's* sequel, *Prince of Lies* (1993) by James Lowder. That book ended when Cyric, the god of strife, went insane; *Crucible* takes place a few years later, when Cyric's madness begins to take its toll in unexpected ways. The gods try Cyric for failing in his godly duties.

Denning says, "One of the problems in writing stories about gods (especially a lot of gods) is that their perspective is so much larger than that of mere mortals. The story gets muddled, and the motivations get lost. To avoid this, I wrote the whole story from the viewpoint of Malik el Sami yn Nasser, a humble, Cyric-worshipping merchant who gets swept up in events. I think the approach worked out well."

Denning will soon start work on his sixteenth novel, a FORGOTTEN REALMS book called *Faces of Deception*. As with the rest, he will bring to the project everything he has: "One of the things I love about fiction writing is that just when you think you understand it, you find a whole new level. My biggest goal is to keep learning more about my craft, both so that it will always stay interesting to me, and so that those who enjoy reading my books will always find more inside than they expect."





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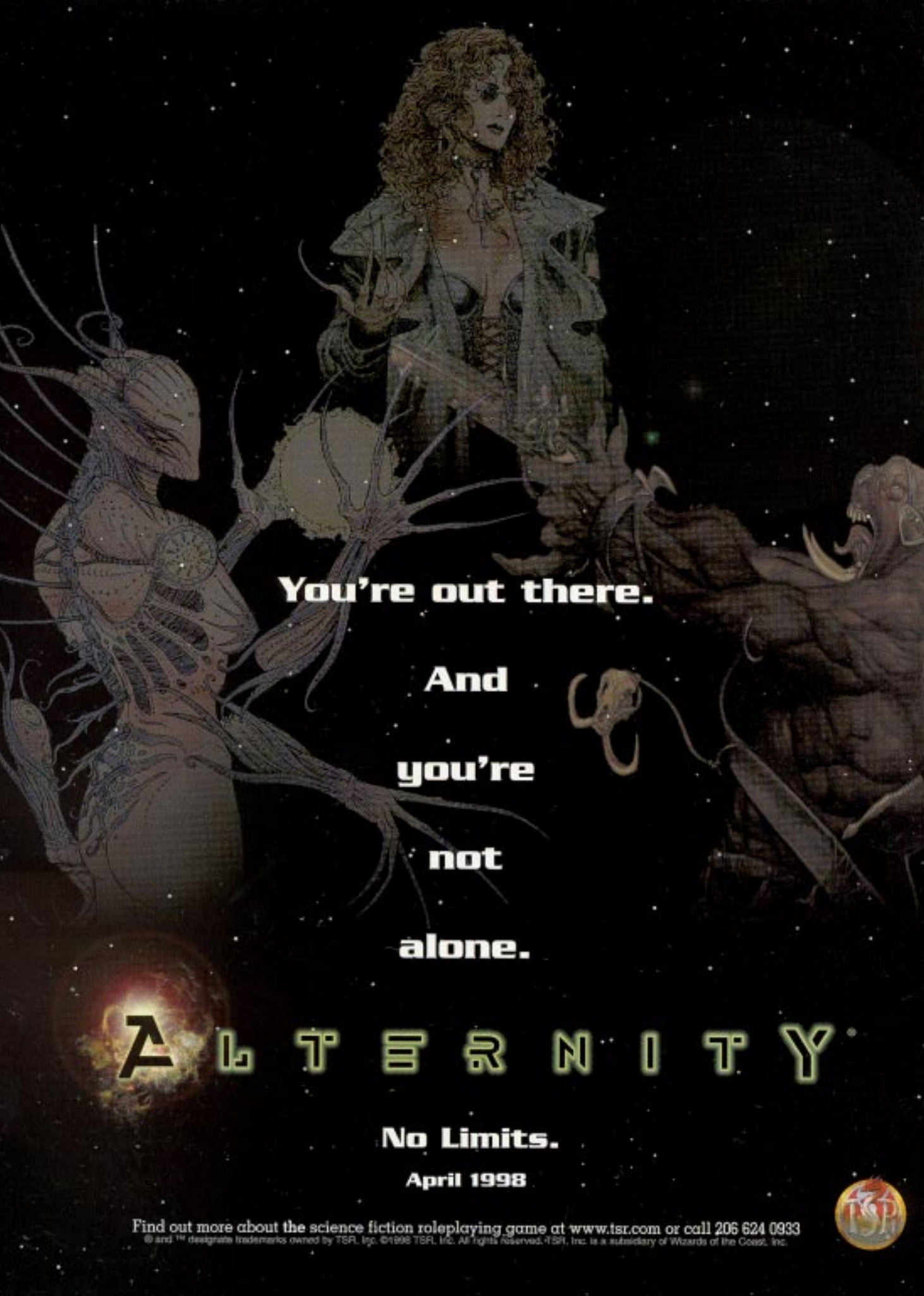


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